

Pain of Memory

by Gabrielle Lawson

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Summary: Dr. Bashir suffers from a strange recurring dream and begins to lose his mind.

1. Part One

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with the generous help of Jo Burgess

Disclaimer: Star Trek: Deep Space Nine is owned by Paramount as are the main characters, Garak, and Admiral Ross. All original characters were created by me. The story, too, though it draws on aspects of the Paramount television series, is original and as such, should not be copied or used without my permission.

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Author's note: While this story can be read alone, it references my other Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Stories to varying degrees. You

might find references to If It's Not One Thing..., Oswiecim, and Healer within.

I dedicate this story to my grandparents: Marjorie Lawson, Alzheimers; Guernie Lawson, Parkinsons; and Charles Bath, Progressive Supranuclear Palsy. And also to Edward Richardson.

****Part One****

It was a soft sound, a high-pitched whining, barely loud enough for a human to hear. But Julian Bashir could hear it, and it woke him from his sleep. He leaned up, propping himself on his elbows, and listened, trying to determine the source of the sound. It seemed to be coming from the wall beside his bunk. _It's probably nothing,_ he told himself, _maybe something as simple as an imbalance in a power coupling._ The Cardassian warship they'd run across yesterday could have caused that. But still, it was too annoying to sleep through. And yet, because of that Cardassian ship, the engineering staff had more pressing things to work on than the doctor's insomnia. It would have to wait. Just as he decided that, the whine stopped. Bashir sighed and began to lower himself back onto the thin mattress.

His head did not reach the pillow. A sharp pain convulsed his body forward as a bright light crackled about his eyes and filled his ears. Electric tendrils reached out to him from the wall, fingering his face and neck, running down his spine. His body jerked involuntarily, and for the one second that he could still think, he thought about crying for help. But his voice was locked in his throat. No sound escaped his lips.

In less than fifteen seconds, it was over. The tendrils removed themselves from his temples and dissipated. Julian Bashir fell motionless back onto his mattress. One leg fell off the bunk entirely and was left hanging over the side.

* * *

><p>"0600 hours," the computer intoned. "You have one message." When no acknowledgment answered it, the computer waited patiently. Five minutes later, it tried again. At 0610, its calm female voice did not reveal any frustration. "0615 hours. You have two messages."<p>

"Huh?" came a mumbled reply.

Dutifully, the computer repeated itself without complaint. "0615 hours. You have two messages." Apparently thankful for a response, it even offered more detailed information. "Most recent message from Chief Miles O'Brien received at 0612 hours."

0612! _Late!_ Bashir sat up so quickly that he hit his head on the ceiling above him. He rubbed his forehead and threw his legs over the side. Actually, he only threw one of them over. He was surprised to find one of them already there. "Play most recent message," he muttered as he jumped down.

"_Julian!_" O'Brien's voice teased. "_I'm surprised at you! If you don't hurry, you won't have time for breakfast._"

Julian yawned, leaning back against the bunk. "Computer, delete last

message and tell me what time it is."

"The time is 0616 hours," the computer stated. "Message deleted."

That's odd, Bashir thought to himself. He'd overslept. But he felt almost as if he hadn't slept at all. Almost. He remembered having dreamed. He shook his head swiftly and forced his eyes open. He didn't have time to stand there working it out. He was running late.

* * *

><p>O'Brien looked up at the door again. Ten minutes already. "He's usually here waiting for us," he told Worf.<p>

"He did have patients last night, Chief," Worf reminded him. "He is the only doctor." He took another bite of his breakfast. "But if he doesn't hurry, his food will get cold."

O'Brien turned toward the door again and saw Julian pushing past the other crewmembers to the table. "Well, you made it," O'Brien teased, "and with six whole minutes to spare."

"I overslept," he offered as an excuse, though he didn't appear satisfied with it either. He covered a yawn as O'Brien slid the plate he'd prepared for him over to him. O'Brien gave him a mug of tea as well.

"Obviously," he said, smiling. "You look tired. Late night?"

Bashir shook his head. "Not really. Feels like it though."

O'Brien noticed he wasn't speaking in full sentences. Of course, he was too busy trying to inhale his breakfast. After a few minutes, he stopped and set his fork down. "Do you ever feel anything while you're dreaming?" Julian asked before taking another bite. He had tried to make it sound like a casual question, but his uncharacteristically furrowed brow went a way toward undermining his intentions.

Worf eyed him suspiciously. "What kind of things?"

"Oh, anything," Julian replied. "I once--when I was a child-- dreamt that I had an ice cream cone. I could actually feel it in my hand. When I woke up, I even had a fist like I'd been holding it." He was holding one hand up to demonstrate.

"I've dreamt I was falling before," O'Brien supplied. "I could feel the weightlessness, the pull of gravity, even the air rushing past me."

Worf nodded, his eyes almost glazing over. "I have dreamt of battle and felt my wounds as if they were real. I could even feel the heat of my opponent's blood as it dripped from my fingers." All around them came the sound of silverware and glasses being hurriedly placed onto trays. Worf looked around him almost sheepishly as at least seven crewmen got up to return their trays.

"Actually, that's not far off," Julian muttered, more to himself than

to anyone in particular. Then he finished the rest of his tea.

It was 0630 and There was a briefing to get to. "What did you dream last night?" O'Brien asked Bashir as they all stood.

Julian's tone didn't change. "That I was being electrocuted."

* * *

><p>That night, after his shift was over and he'd had dinner with the Chief and the other senior officers, he went straight back to his quarters. He was determined not to have another day like that one. He'd dragged himself through the morning. Only concern for his patients was able to bring him out of the fog of fatigue that followed him nearly the whole day. He'd perked up a bit at lunch, thanks to some lively conversation with Ensign Walker. But by late afternoon, he was yawning again. His temper had shortened, too, and he'd snapped at Nurse Hausmann before leaving for the day. He apologized once he realized he'd done it, but he still felt bad. He didn't want to be an ogre. He just wanted to sleep.<p>

To relax himself, he decided to take a shower and do some reading. He turned up the heat in his quarters a few more degrees, and climbed into the upper bunk where he normally slept. He dimmed all the lights except the one in the bunk. He chose one of Shoggath's Enigma Tales Garak had given him a few years back. He found them predictable and boring. Just the thing to send him off to sleep.

Just as he was about to nod off, he heard it. The whine began softly with a high-pitch. Bashir made a mental note to ask O'Brien to send someone to look into it in the morning. It stopped by itself, so he turned back to the book. The first shock caused him to jerk so forcefully that the PADD was thrown from his hand.

* * *

><p>"0615" the computer droned, reaching into his emerging consciousness. "You have two messages."<p>

Bashir's eyes flew open and then promptly shut themselves again. Still it was too long. The sudden influx of light had already started a headache behind his eyes. He groaned and rolled off the bed. "Why did you turn on the light?" he asked the computer.

"Please restate the question."

"The light," Bashir repeated, yawning. "In my bunk. It's on. Why?"

"The light was turned on at 2100 hours as ordered," the computer answered.

2100 hours. _Forget it, Julian,_ Bashir told himself. _You're late._ He stumbled toward the shower and nearly tripped when he stepped on something. Looking down, he saw an activated PADD on the floor. He picked it up. It displayed the first page of the second chapter of a Cardassian Enigma Tale. _Strange,_ he thought. He had stopped reading those a couple of years ago, insisting that Garak give him something less predictable and more interesting to read.

* * *

><p>"Late again," O'Brien teased when he entered the mess hall. "Your breakfast is waiting."<p>

"What would I do without you?" Bashir offered with a smile he didn't really feel. He felt tired. Only tired. And hungry.

"Nightmares again," O'Brien asked.

Bashir turned his head sharply in surprise. He immediately regretted it. It sent an equally sharp burst of pain through his head. It went away quickly though. "Who said anything about nightmares?" he asked, hoping to sound nonchalant. He hadn't told anyone about the nightmares

"You did," O'Brien pointed out, as he took a bite of his own breakfast. "Electrocution," he added, still chewing.

"Oh." Bashir smiled again, relieved. "Yeah, same one. And I'm just as tired this morning. More tired, actually. Like I haven't slept at all. But that doesn't make much sense. I was so tired yesterday, I apparently fell asleep with the light on. It was still on this morning."

* * *

><p>"End Medical Log," Bashir said, touching a control to end the recording. He covered his mouth as he felt another yawn coming. His eyes watered and his eyelids felt heavy. But it was only 1500 hours. The day wasn't over yet.<p>

As if to emphasize that point, the deck suddenly shifted beneath him, sending at least two of his staff to the floor. The klaxon went off right after, and the lights changed, indicating Red Alert. "We're under attack," Bashir surmised, just as a second volley struck the Defiant. Still, he managed to get out of his seat and help one of the nurses to his feet. A few others stumbled through the door. Nurse Baines already had the kits out. Many of the medical staff now kept med kits in their quarters as Bashir did. They wouldn't have to report to Sickbay. But some were on duty in other areas of the ship.

Casualty and damage reports began to pour in with the next round of torpedoes. Bashir sent his staff out to the various parts of the ship. He checked the contents of his own med kit and then headed for the bridge.

* * *

><p>Exhausted, Bashir didn't even bother to undress. It was nearly midnight. Kicking off his shoes, he climbed up to his bunk and collapsed onto the pillow. "Computer," he mumbled and waited for the computer to chirp its acknowledgment. "Wake me up at 0600 hours." In minutes he was asleep.<p>

Twenty-six minutes after he lay down, the whine began. But he was too asleep, too exhausted even to hear it. His body tensed as the first tendril reached out to touch his temple. At that his eyes flew open, but then the electricity hit full-force, sending his body into

convulsions and locking his mind into one single thought: pain.

Each convulsion threatened to drop him off the side of the bunk, and it was gravity that eventually broke the connection. The tendrils lashed out in vain, searching for him. But he was beyond their reach, unconscious on the floor.

* * *

><p>"0620" the computer intoned. "You have six messages."<p>

Bashir stirred, and then winced. Instinctively, his hand reached for his temple, the source of the pain. He opened his eyes quickly after that. His index finger had felt the irregularity of a scab there. Before he could investigate, however, he was surprised to find that he was not in his bunk. A spot of red on the carpet beneath his face confirmed the scab. He'd been bleeding.

"How many messages?" he asked, his voice still muffled by the morning. Late again. Very late.

"You have six messages," the computer answered. "Most recent from Chief Miles O'Brien."

Bashir was about to have the computer delete them, since he knew what they would say. But his door chimed before he could order it. "Who is it?" he asked, standing. If it was the captain, he'd have to get dressed.

"It's me, Julian," the Chief called from the other side of the door. "You up?"

Bashir let out a sigh of relief. "Yeah," he answered, trying to keep from yawning. "I'm up." Then he noticed he was already dressed. But the stubble on his chin told him he hadn't shaved. It was all rather strange. Waking up on the floor, dressed, but not shaved. He didn't remember any of it. Just the dream. So real, that dream. He shook it off. "Come on in, Miles."

The door opened and O'Brien entered. "You look like hell, Julian."

"Good morning," Bashir muttered back. "I've just got to shave. I'll be ready in a minute." Julian left him in the main room while he went to shave.

"You had breakfast?" O'Brien asked, already moving to the replicator. "Tarkalian tea and a glazed donut," he ordered. "It's not much, but you haven't got time for anything else. Trouble sleeping again?"

Julian emerged from the other room, clean shaven, but still with dark shadows under his eyes. "I really don't know," he admitted. "I remember the dream, but I feel so drained."

O'Brien handed him the donut, but held the tea while Julian pulled on his shoes. "Maybe you should run some tests. Something's wrong. I've never known you to oversleep like this."

"I've never been this tired either." Julian took a bite and then

rethought his last remark. "Well, maybe, but that was awhile ago. Circumstances couldn't be more different."

O'Brien waited for him to finish the donut and then handed him the tea as they stepped out into the corridor. "It's probably just stress," he suggested. "War time, and all. You've been through a lot. It's bound to get to you eventually."

* * *

><p>The Defiant, having completed its mission, spent the rest of the day heading back to the station. There were no more reports of Dominion or Cardassian ships in the area. No new anomalies to keep the crew's attention. It was a slow day. O'Brien hadn't minded though. He and his engineering teams had needed the time to repair the ship. The battle the day before had blown out the impulse engines and the forward shields.

The Defiant docked at the station at 1900 hours. O'Brien's shift was over, so he assigned work crews to continue the repairs on the _Defiant_ and invited Doctor Bashir over for dinner. Keiko was away with the children for the weekend. "I'm feeling Italian, tonight," he told Bashir as they entered his quarters. "How about you?"

"I'm open to anything," Bashir sighed. "Do you need any help?"

"No, it's alright," O'Brien replied. "Just have a seat." Chester, having heard the door open, ran from the bedroom and collided softly with O'Brien's shin. O'Brien could already hear him purring. "I suppose you want dinner, too." But Chester responded by turning his back on O'Brien to investigate the guest who had sat down on the sofa. "I'll take that as a 'no.'"

O'Brien left Bashir with the cat and walked over to the replicator. "Fettuccini alfredo," he ordered. "Two servings." Lights began to swirl inside the opening of the replicator until two steaming plates of pasta appeared there. O'Brien reached in to remove them and then turned to set them on the table. "What do you want to go with it?" he asked Bashir.

When Bashir didn't answer, he looked up. Bashir was leaning on the arm of the sofa, his arm propped under his head like a pillow. His eyes were closed. Chester had found a nice spot in the nook made by Bashir's hip, since the doctor's legs were still over the side. His eyes were closed, too, at least as far as O'Brien could see. The cat was curled into a tight, furry ball, with one paw placed over his nose.

O'Brien smiled. "Good job, Chester," he whispered and put one plate back in the replicator.

* * *

><p>The sun was just beginning to dip beneath the lower branches of the pine trees around him. It had been a beautiful day and a beautiful sunset, with the colors of blue and pink firelite beneath the rolling clouds. But now the sun was past the trees, about to dip beneath the land. The sky above the treetops was dark and looming, while the firelight was hidden by branches and pine needles.

The wind picked up and he found himself beside a lake. The first echoes of thunder met his ear and the tranquility of the forest lake left him. He was afraid of the thunder. He had to find shelter. There was a flash of light, reflected eerily across the strangely still glassy surface of the water. The thunder boomed loud and fast behind the light. It would catch him.

There, up ahead, but still across the lake, was a cabin. Lightning reflected in the windows and thunder shook the ground. He almost slipped in the mud beside the banks. The wind picked up until he felt it wanted to push him into the lake. Firelight glowed in the windows of the cabin, welcoming him. Smoke billowed up from the chimney. He tried to run, but the mud was slippery. Rain poured down, drowning his view of the cabin.

And then the light and sound were one. With blinding, deafening force, he was thrown from his feet into the icy water of the lake. But he didn't feel the cold. The fire and energy still coursed through him. Liquid fire surrounded him, licked at his skin, poured down his throat, burned in his lungs. And in the strange consciousness that dreaming allows, he wasn't sure if he was drowning or dying of electrocution.

Bashir woke with a start, gasping for breath as droplets of water fell from his forehead into his eyes. They stung. He was sweating. _Just a dream,_ he told himself, _like before._ It was dark and he felt pricks against his chest. Now that he thought about it, he felt weight against his chest. Then he heard the rumble, and his eyes began to adjust. "Chester," he whispered, realizing that he must still be in O'Brien's quarters.

The cat responded by stretching one of his front paws out to touch Bashir's face. His sharp claws gently pricked his chin. He purred louder and then snuggled back into a ball and went back to sleep.

Trying not to disturb the cat, he checked the time. 0230. Still late at night. It was the first time since the dreams had started that he woke up before morning. But he was still tired, and there was something hypnotic about watching a cat sleep. His eyelids began to drop, and despite the lightning waiting for him in his dreams, he let them close. The vibrations of Chester's purr were soothing, and he soon fell asleep again.

2. Part Two

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****Part Two****

Two Weeks Later

"Well, Doctor," Captain Sisko said as O'Brien and Bashir entered the room. "Sleep well?" They were the first to arrive.

Bashir blushed but apparently couldn't find a good answer. "Yes, sir."

Sisko felt a little guilty. He'd only meant it as a teasing remark, but Bashir had taken it as a sort of rebuke. "That wasn't a criticism." Bashir hadn't complained in the last couple of weeks, but it was obvious to everyone that he was exhausted. The casualties that had been trickling in from other ships had kept him busy, while the rest of the crew had been able to enjoy the lull in Dominion activity around the station. His eyes had taken on a shadowed look, he yawned almost uncontrollably, and he had occasionally snapped at his nurses. He had been quiet, too, not offering his usual insights into the briefings and happenings of the war. _That_, however, was not so unusual anymore. But Sisko had even noted the way his eyes had almost crossed during one of the briefings the week before. To his credit--and O'Brien's elbow--he kept them open, but Sisko could tell he was drained. "Take a seat, gentlemen."

Worf and Nog were the next to enter, though Kira and Odo weren't far behind. Ezri Dax was the last. She yawned and took her seat. "We just got a new mission," Sisko told everyone, opening the briefing. "At 0600 hours this morning, the _Vesmir_ reported sighting a lone Cardassian ship patrolling the Badlands," Sisko began. He pressed some controls and a map appeared on the viewscreen at one end of the room. "They picked up some unusual readings from their sensors as well." Sisko handed a PADD to O'Brien, who let Nog, who was at the briefing by virtue of his being the _Defiant_'s helmsman, look on with him.

"Galor-class, by the looks of it," Nog concluded.

"Except the energy output from their impulse engines are all wrong," O'Brien added.

"The _Vesmir_'s science officer concurred," Sisko agreed. "But they didn't have long to ponder the situation. The Cardassian ship exploded at 0610, taking the _Vesmir_ with it."

Bashir shook his head, looking at the viewscreen. "But they were nowhere near that ship," Bashir stated. "They were at the limits of the _Vesmir_'s long-range sensors. Even a warp core breach wouldn't have hit them."

Sisko nodded, relieved to see that Bashir was still on top of the game. "Which is why we're discussing the _Vesmir_ this morning."

"_Vesmir_," Ezri repeated. "Isn't that a private ship?"

Sisko nodded. "From Nova Czeska colony."

"So what were they doing all they way out by the Badlands?" Kira asked. Nova Czeska was an old Earth colony, well within the Federation borders.

"Nova Czeska is the only Federation planet with permission to trade with the Gidari homeworld," Sisko explained. He'd had to do his

homework this morning. He'd asked the same questions. The Gidari were a secretive race whom some mistakenly termed xenophobic. The Gidari weren't afraid of other races, and they certainly didn't want to be isolated from them. They enjoyed trade almost as much as Ferengi, but they deemed themselves quite superior to any other sentient lifeforms they'd come in contact with. They didn't care to be polluted by other cultures or to have their own culture open to examination by others. At least that was the best interpretation Starfleet had yet put on their behavior. And Sisko, having had only one experience with the Gidari in all his years in Starfleet, had found no reason yet to disagree.

"They have to run a preset, meandering, course," he continued, "no deviations. Our best estimate of the location of the Gidari homeworld puts them 6 days out from Bajor at warp 7. It would have taken the Vesmir twice that long. But it also means it put them within sensor range of the Badlands and our doomed Cardassian friends."

"How many Czechs were on the Vesmir, Captain?" Bashir asked, biting back another yawn.

Sisko forgot the Cardassian ship and took a moment to remember the Vesmir's loss. "New Prague reports a crew manifest of 58, Doctor, under Captain Neumannova. She trained with me at the Academy. Anthropology and Astrophysics. Couldn't help but remember such a combination. She resigned from the fleet at the request of New Prague when they got the Gidari contract." But there was a war on and time for reminiscing was scarce. "New Prague wants to know why their ship was destroyed. And Starfleet wants to know why the Cardassian ship exploded. So we're the logical choice to investigate."

"Shouldn't take long," O'Brien commented dryly. "There's not much left of either of them."

* * *

><p>O'Brien was right. The investigation had taken no more than three hours but had still to offer up any answers. The *Vesmir* left the sensors little to work with beyond their earlier transmission. There were no survivors, and there weren't even any large fragments of the ship. There was even less of the Cardassians, though their debris field still gave off odd sensor readings. Worf was given the task of deciphering them.

The Defiant returned nearly empty-handed to the station, with no explanation to offer the Czechs or Starfleet. Starfleet did have information to offer, however. Action near the Klingon border. It was far enough away from DS9 that the Defiant was not ordered to join the battle. The station was close enough though, that the casualties would still be coming their way. Sisko sighed and relayed the information to Bashir.

* * *

><p>"Good morning," Sisko said, welcoming his officers to the next morning's briefing.<p>

"Where's Julian?" O'Brien asked as he surveyed the room.

Kira answered his question. "Working. The Venture docked at 0300

with casualties. Their medical staff was glad for the help. I'm sure their engineering crew would be, too."

O'Brien nodded. It would be a busy day. "Where were they when they were hit?" he asked. "Things have been relatively quiet around here."

"Near the Klingon border," Kira supplied. "With the fighting there, we were the safest port to come to."

"How bad was it?" The Chief was trying to make mental notes on how many engineers he could spare.

"Shouldn't take you more than a week, Chief," Sisko broke in. "In the meantime, we still have a Cardassian ship to think about. Anything there, Mr. Worf?"

"Nothing in our records matches the sensor readings from the debris," Worf replied. He put the readings up on the main viewscreen in the room.

"But some of those readings are vaguely familiar," Dax jumped in.

"To you, but not to the computer?" Kira didn't understand. She didn't see anything familiar there.

"Well, the computer might have thought it familiar a few years ago, before certain records were purged." Odo added, looking both angry and proud, like he'd solved the mystery already but wasn't thrilled with the solution.

"Gidari," Ezri exclaimed. They all remembered the Gidari's last visit. They were not the most polite of people.

Odo shot her a sideways look. But then he continued. "The records were purged at their _request._" His tone on the last word indicated that it hadn't been a simple request. In fact, the Gidari had ordered the records purged to protect their overzealous secrecy.

Kira nodded, remembering now. "We had one of their knives."

Odo explained, "When Dax scanned it for DNA traces, the metal was also scanned. It had the same sort of sensor spikes as the debris."

O'Brien stood up and walked to the screen, taking a closer look. He remembered the knife, and how Dax had been fascinated by the readings she got from it, hoping it was a clue to the Gidari or their homeworld. "About the only thing I can tell you definitively about the knife is that the metal had been exposed to massive amounts of ultraviolet and infrared radiation. And that's all I can definitively say about the debris from the Cardassian ship." He returned to his seat.

"So they were carrying something Gidari," Sisko worked out. "They were within sensor range of the Vesmir."

"Could the Gidari have infiltrated the Cardassian ship?" Kira posed.

"Not likely," Odo answered, though he didn't elaborate.

Dax agreed. "They wouldn't fit in. The Gidari never go anywhere unnoticed. The hoods make them conspicuous, and Julian said they were blue under the hoods."

"So are Bolians," Kira countered. "Besides, if Bashir can make Odo or you into Klingons, why couldn't they do Cardassians?"

Sisko thought about it but still rejected the idea. "It's possible, but they'd probably never lower themselves to either the deception or the target species. In Gidari eyes, they're all inferior. But let's not belabor the point. Let's assume the Cardassians or their Dominion allies brought a Gidari substance on board. How did they get it, and what was it supposed to do?"

"Could they have taken it from the _Vesmir_?" Worf suggested.

O'Brien shook his head. "Too far. Their last known positions were as close as those two ships ever got."

Kira had been pensive for the last few moments. "The Gidari were able to get through all of our defenses. They beamed through our shields and broke out of our tractor beam with little effort."

"I remember," Ezri said.

O'Brien remembered, too. They all did. "Fortunately for us, they weren't overtly hostile at the time."

"The Dominion could use technology like that," Kira finished.

"Those were my thoughts," Sisko admitted.

"Then we were lucky they blew up," O'Brien decided.

* * *

><p>Julian Bashir finally returned to the station at 1230 hours. His stomach had been growling for the last five hours and was growing more insistent every minute. He could have eaten on the Venture, but the critical patients were in good hands and today was Wednesday. Bashir had lunch with Garak on Wednesdays.

"You look terrible," Garak said in greeting as Bashir neared the table at the Replimat.

Bashir dropped himself into the waiting chair. "Thank you for noticing."

"Really, Doctor, you must insist on getting more sleep," Garak scolded. "Your health is as important as any on this station. Shall I order for you?"

"That would be very helpful," Julian decided. "Thank you." While Garak got up to go to the replicator, Bashir rubbed his tired eyes. He was tempted to call off lunch altogether and catch a nap, but his stomach was still empty. He'd had no breakfast.

"A busy morning, I take it." Garak had returned with a light but nutritious and filling meal. A Bajoran meal, in fact, with Tarkalian tea.

Bashir removed his hand. "My eyelids hurt," he sighed. "Yes, very busy. They had lost seven people before they reached the station. We lost four more while I was there."

Garak looked up surreptitiously from his food. "Yes, the Cardassians are touting the 'victory' over the Venture back home."

Bashir knew that tone. He ignored his stomach, forgot his eyelids, and focused all of his attention on the clothier across the table. "Really?"

"Oh, yes. The valiant crew of the Enirak is being honored for their heroic sacrifice." Garak waved his hand with a flourish as he spoke. "It appears the crippling blow they delivered to the Venture was also their last. The ship was lost with all hands."

That didn't fit, and Garak knew it. Some of the patients had talked, and the staff had filled him in on the rest. The Venture had been attacked by a Dominion vessel. There were no Cardassian ships in the area.

"I'm sure," Garak added, "Captain Sisko will want to fill you in on this morning's briefing which you missed. After you finish eating, of course."

Bashir ate quickly, drawing a scolding glance from Garak, but he ignored it. Duty first. He listened politely as Garak continued his thoughts from their previous lunch about the latest book he wanted to recommend. "After I finish the last one," Bashir promised. "I'm sorry, Garak, but I really must run." His tray was now empty.

Garak nodded his understanding, and Bashir excused himself from the table. He returned his tray to the replicator and turned to leave. His path to exit took him right by Garak's table again. Garak caught his arm. "Fifty-seven souls. It really is a tragedy."

His arm released, Bashir continued out the door. He found Sisko in his office in Ops.

"How are the patients, Doctor?" Sisko asked in greeting.

"Eleven dead," Bashir answered, still standing in front of Sisko's desk. "Fourteen stable but critical, and thirty-three lesser injuries. It's been a very busy morning."

"I can see that." Sisko gestured for Bashir to sit. "Do you think they can do without you for the rest of the day?"

Bashir hesitated to sit. "Why?" he asked, alarmed. "What's happened?"

Sisko chuckled. "Sit down. Nothing's happened. I just think you need a break. You look terrible."

The alarm faded and Bashir sat. "So I've been told. I had lunch with

Mr. Garak today."

Sisko leaned back in his chair, a knowing and slightly amused look crossed his face. "More literature?"

"Of course," Bashir remarked. "But I think he also related the name of our mysterious Cardassian ship."

* * *

><p>Doctor Bashir had gladly accepted the captain's advice and had taken the rest of the day off, spending most of it in bed asleep. He returned to the Venture the next morning, hoping to see that all the patients were doing well. He was greeted by a tired, but cheerful Dr. Marin as she led Bashir to the patients. "Good to see you again," she said. "I can't thank you enough for your help yesterday."

Bashir smiled. "It's what I do. I was glad to help."

Marin smiled, too. "I've downgraded all but two of the patients to stable," she reported. "Hansen and Jarofana are still critical, but I'm optimistic." As she talked she led Bashir over to the biobeds where the two critical patients were. She handed him a PADD.

Bashir looked over the PADD as Marin ran through the readings on the biobeds. "Jarofana, you'll remember, was our burn victim," she said as she neared the last bed.

"Fifty-five percent third degree, I believe," Bashir answered, nodding.

"Fluids have helped, along with the synthetic skin," Marin continued. "But we're having a bit more trouble fighting the infection. We've got her on corophizine. But we'll gladly take suggestions."

Bashir checked the readings on the bed. Marin's prognosis was logical and corophizine was a sufficient antibiotic. "Sounds good," he said. "She'll need cosmetic surgery once she recovers sufficiently."

Marin just nodded. "If she recovers sufficiently. We'll keep her and Hansen under close observation."

"I hope they both do well," Bashir commented sincerely. "But it looks like you have things well in hand for now."

Marin nodded, putting the PADD away. "And since we've got repairs," Marin added, "we should be here a little while. That will give us all time to rest up a bit. Thank you again for your help, Doctor."

* * *

><p>The Venture remained for two more days, and when she left, O'Brien breathed a sigh of relief. The war had increased his workload three-fold, but it had also kept him so busy that routine repairs and maintenance went undone. Now that the Dominion had backed off from this sector--for whatever reasons they had done so--the maintenance and repair schedule was enough to keep a crew four times as large as O'Brien's engineering staff occupied. The Venture had only added to that.

But now the Venture was gone, the Defiant was docked, and all but two of the runabouts were out on maneuvers. All of which left only the station to deal with, and that was still a very large job. But, for now, it was the job of the night shift. For the Chief of Operations, the day was over. He'd already reserved a holosuite from Quark so he headed for the bar. O'Brien knew he'd meet Julian there, if he hadn't gotten tied up with patients in the Infirmary.

Quark's was crowded, which was no surprise. Martok's ship had docked the day before, so there were several Klingons in view. He didn't really have to see them though. They had a distinct smell to them when too many were in a relatively small area. A Tarkalian eyed O'Brien suspiciously from the bar, but O'Brien ignored him. He remembered the man as the one Molly had attacked. But the man had not given him any trouble since, so O'Brien didn't seek any out.

Bashir was already there, at the end of the bar. As O'Brien approached, he threw one of the darts he held in his hands. O'Brien, noting how close Bashir was standing to the board--the standard distance-- expected to see the dart fly effortlessly into the bull's-eye. But it didn't happen. The dart barely made it onto the board at all. It landed less than two inches from the outside of the board. There was another dart already on the board, just to the right of center, perhaps an inch and a half off its mark. Bashir didn't seem to notice that anyone was watching and threw the last of his darts. This one was better, just clearing the outer edge of the bull's-eye. Not a bad shot for a normal person. But Bashir wasn't normal. O'Brien had been making him shoot from farther back since he found out that Julian's genetic enhancements had also improved his hand-eye coordination. At the standard distance, Bashir normally couldn't miss.

"Something wrong?" O'Brien asked, startling the doctor as he returned from the board. "Or are you planning on hustling someone?" His mouth turned up in a grin.

"Oh, hi," Bashir said in greeting. After a moment, he smiled, too. "I was just practicing. Feel like a game."

"From the looks of things, you don't," O'Brien joked. "Besides, we have a reservation. What's it to be tonight? The Alamo? Falcon versus Bashir?"

Bashir shook his head, as they each took a seat on a bar stool. "Oh, not that."

Quark met them at their seats. "Synthale," O'Brien ordered. He instantly forgot the Ferengi and turned back to Bashir. "Why not? I thought you liked those. Felix writes them just for you."

Bashir looked down at his own drink on the bar and shook his head again. "I just don't."

"You haven't," O'Brien said, "not since. . . . Well, you know. You could use the practice."

Bashir let his drink fall back onto the bar. "But it's not real, Miles. Those programs are set up to give me every advantage."

"Only when your adversaries are holograms," O'Brien countered. "I don't give you every advantage. Besides, you still have to think them out, outsmart the program."

"I don't think it will help me when the time comes." He took a long drink. "I'd rather do something a little more relaxing."

"And losing at darts is more relaxing?" O'Brien asked. "You didn't look so relaxed a minute ago when you nearly missed the board. And you were standing close. What was that all about?"

"I don't know. Aim was off?"

O'Brien studied his friend. A lot had happened to Bashir over the years, but he'd rarely ever been so dull. "You know what I think?"

"What do you think?"

"I think the war is getting to you." He set his drink down hard on the bar as if to punctuate his thought. "You keep too much inside, Julian." Bashir put his own drink down and faced him with a look of wide-eyed wonder. O'Brien felt more confident. He'd gotten to him. "Bad things happen to you, and you don't talk about them. You go on as if everything's the same. But it's not. If you don't do something about it little by little, it will eventually wear you down. And right now, you look worn down."

Bashir turned back to his drink without saying anything. Not that he didn't try. He actually opened his mouth, but no words came out. He closed it again. O'Brien grinned on the inside. Bashir was speechless. "Maybe," O'Brien went on, not really knowing if he was pushing too far or not, "you got so good at keeping _certain things_ a secret that you got used to keeping everything in. You need to relieve some stress, my friend."

Bashir shrugged, non-committal. "What do you suggest?"

"I hate to do it," O'Brien said, smiling, "but seeing as you're my friend and all, I suggest a game or two of racquetball."

Bashir smiled. "You're sure your ego can take that? I'll win."

Now O'Brien shrugged as he finished off his synthale. "Maybe not. We haven't played for several years now. You might at least be out of practice."

Bashir laughed. "Alright. I need to go back to my court and change. I'll meet you in, say, fifteen minutes."

O'Brien wasn't sure he heard that right. "What?"

Bashir finished his own drink and slid off the barstool. "I said I'd have to go to my quarters and change."

"See, you _are_ stressed." O'Brien stepped down, too.

"What did you think I said?" Julian asked as they both headed for the door, threading their way through the crowd.

* * *

><p>Julian Bashir raised his arm to touch a control on the viewscreen above his desk. His arm ached a bit when he did so, but he didn't mind. It hurt less than the day before or even the one before that. It was a good pain, the reminder of a good workout. He felt healthier for it. He let a chuckle slip past him. Chief O'Brien felt worse. He'd lost each of the three games they'd played last night, though not without putting up a good fight. As with darts, Bashir's game was down. O'Brien had been able to get in several shots that Julian should have been able to counter with ease. The more equal competition between them, then, had made the contest harder, but also more satisfying. And it appeared to have the desired effect. By the time they had called it a night, Bashir was exhausted. He slept deeply and dreamlessly that night, and he awoke still feeling relaxed, if a bit sore.<p>

"Doctor."

The voice had come from behind him, and it was a familiar voice. He turned to face the door. "Garak, hello," he said, rising from his chair. "Is something wrong?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing," Garak said.

"What do you mean?"

"Lunch, Doctor," Garak replied. "You are planning on eating, I hope."

Today? Julian thought. He quickly ran through the days in his head. Had it been a week already? "Today's Wednesday," he realized aloud. "I'm sorry, I've lost track of the time."

"Or rather the days," the Cardassian interjected with a small smile. "Shall we?"

"Of course," Bashir said, but he turned back to his desk. "Just let me save my work."

"You'd think there wasn't a war on," Garak commented as they left the Infirmary.

Bashir stepped around a Ventralen woman and tried not to bump into her companion. "People need to eat, Garak."

"All at the same time?" Garak was nearly pushed into a wall. "You'd think they'd go in shifts."

"The soldiers do," Bashir replied. "Not everyone here is in the military."

They were lucky to find a table at the Replimat, but only because they found Kira and Odo there just about to leave. "So tell me, Doctor," Garak said, as they sat down, "have you heard any more about our mysterious Cardassian ship?"

"I could ask you the same thing." Bashir started to take a bit of his food and then looked down in confusion at his plate. "I ordered this?"

Garak peered across the table at the plate too. "Yes, you did. Is there a problem, Doctor?"

Bashir met Garak's gaze. He didn't remember ordering pasta. "No," he said, "no problem." He ate it anyway. How else could it have gotten on his plate?

"To answer your question," Garak went on, taking a bit of his food. "No, I have heard nothing."

Bashir nodded, eating his food as well. "Me neither."

"On to other things then." Garak reached under the table. "I've been reading," he said, as he straightened again, "another piece of your 'classic' human literature."

Bashir smiled, taking interest. "Oh, which one?" It was always a welcome change from the Cardassian books Garak was always throwing at him.

"Dickens," Garak answered. "_A Tale of Two Cities._" He then took his hands from under the table in order to place the book beside his plate. A real book, on paper.

Bashir's smile widened. He picked up the book and flipped it open. It was one of his favorites--even if only for the last two pages. Well, and that first paragraph. "What do you think of it?"

Garak set his fork down and leaned forward. "Do you really want to know?"

Bashir's shoulders involuntarily slumped. "You don't like it."

"Oh, it has some beautiful language," Garak replied, smiling slightly. "I'll give you that. Especially at the beginning and at the end. The middle, I'm afraid, is somewhat more of a chore."

Bashir nodded. He agreed--so far. "But . . . ," he said, giving Garak the opening he knew the other man wanted.

"But," Garak took it up, "there's more to literature than beautiful language. Language matters little when what one says is drivel."

"Drivel?" Bashir could understand some criticism of the book, but he couldn't see calling it drivel.

"Well really, Doctor, if you break it down, language is all it has. The characters are anything but realistic. The plot is fanciful, and the ending is a farce."

"A farce?" Bashir repeated, feeling the word stab into his heart.

"Shall we start with the woman?" Garak asked. "Have you ever met such a woman? I've seen badly written holograms with more life than Lucie Manette."

"Okay," Bashir admitted, "she's not entirely three-dimensional. But

you have to understand the era in which it was written. And it was written by a man. Women weren't considered equal then."

"Hardly an excuse," Garak argued, "for a writer of fiction. Besides, there are male characters as well. What of Sydney Carton?"

"You didn't think he was three-dimensional?" Bashir challenged. "He's probably the best developed character in there."

"A sad fact, but true," Garak gave, punctuating his statement with his fork. "But what a waste! He is intelligent, more so than that charlatan who claims to be an attorney. Carton does all the work and lets the other man take credit. For what? I tell you, he was bent on self-destruction from the beginning."

"That might have been Dickens's point," Bashir tried, "that his--" He paused, since the word he was just about to say seemed to have disappeared from his tongue. It was Carton's calling, what he was supposed to do, what his whole life was leading towards, inevitable. But the word just wasn't there. Garak was waiting for him to finish the sentence though. "His--"

"Destiny?" Garak supplied, eyeing him curiously.

Destiny. "Yes, his destiny was to give himself."

"To die in sacrifice is not an unworthy destiny," Garak countered. "But for what does he sacrifice? Not the state. Not his people or his family. But his rival."

"No, not his rival," Bashir shook his head. "His love. He loved Lucie, but she loved Charles. He gave himself to save her from the sorrow of losing her husband. It was the one thing he could do in his whole life to make theirs better."

"It's a pointless death," Garak held. "And the entire last two pages were merely conjecture, never coming to pass. He died, never knowing what effect it could have had."

Bashir opened his mouth to continue the debate--he felt the book deserved it--but he really couldn't think of another answer to Garak's criticism. It was conjecture. Carton was not offered paper to write his thoughts. All the thoughts that Dickens recorded were conjecture. But, of course, the whole book was conjecture. A work of fiction. "I'm sorry you didn't enjoy it, Garak. I think it's a beautiful story."

"You would," Garak said, derisively. "You have an air of self-sacrifice about you."

Bashir didn't know how to take that. He'd never thought of himself as particularly self-sacrificial. "I thought Cardassians valued sacrifice," he said, hoping to turn the conversation away from himself.

"Sacrifice with a purpose," Garak corrected. "There's a difference."

They finished the lunch amiably, and said their good-byes until next week and their next shared lunch. Having rescued the book from Garak,

Julian Bashir had carried it back to the Infirmary with a firm plan to put Mr. Shoggath away in favor of the good Mr. Dickens once his shift was over. But until then, he had work to do. Reports, mostly. Paperwork. Boring, but necessary in the long run. Most of it was so familiar from the last six years that he could nearly do it from rote, looking up only a few facts and figures to fit the current data. Other reports merely needed a summary of his logs. That, too, was not too difficult. He'd be done in time for dinner.

* * *

><p>O'Brien stuck his head in the door at 2000 hours. "Still at it?" he asked. "You should have been an engineer. Less paperwork."<p>

"Not really," Bashir answered without turning. "You're a department head. You still have paperwork."

O'Brien stepped into the Infirmary and stopped just behind Bashir. "You gonna be long? I thought we could get in a game of darts."

"Not racquetball?" Bashir said, still working.

"I don't think I could handle losing again. This time, it's your turn. Darts."

Bashir squinted at the screen in front of him and sighed, finally seeing the problem. He'd included Mratinis's name but entered the same treatment as he had for Lidlin, which explained the leftover information detailing the treatment of plasma burns and lacerations. Mratinis had been too close to an exploding console. Lidlin had only had tendinitis. "I would Miles," he replied, "but these reports have to be out by tomorrow." This was the third such careless mistake he'd found. Now he worried about his other reports. He'd have to go over them all again.

"Stress again," O'Brien warned.

Bashir nodded, agreeing. "Yeah, but it doesn't change the deadline. How about a game tomorrow night? No more paperwork for at least another week." He finished repairing the damage to his summary of Mratinis's treatment and opened the previous report.

"Okay, then," O'Brien said. "Tomorrow night, if I have to drag you out of here."

"Agreed." O'Brien left, and Bashir spent the next three hours on the reports, regretting the fact that he'd have no time left to deal with Dickens this evening. He was already beginning to yawn uncontrollably. He decided to just grab something quick from the replicator when he got back to his quarters and then go to bed.

The Habitat Ring was nearly deserted when he arrived. It was late and most people were tucked inside their quarters already. Bashir felt a little dizzy for a moment as the identical corridors passed by him. They all looked alike. He actually passed his own corridor before he realized he'd missed it and turned back. Once inside, he set the book he was carrying on the table next to Kukalaka and took himself straight into the bedroom.

* * *

><p>The book was there for him in the morning, and since he was up early--which was odd in itself--he decided to take advantage of the extra half hour. There it was: that first paragraph. Or rather, the first sentence, since that was the whole paragraph. It was one long, run-on, brilliant sentence. The best of times, the worst of times. . . . He knew the feeling. His time on Deep Space Nine had been the best time of his life thus far. It had also been the worst. He was beginning to believe very much in contradictions. Dickens knew well of their existence, their truth.<p>

It was the next two paragraphs on the first page that began to bother him. The language, though English, was well over half a millennium old, but even still, he'd always been able to read past the barrier of the antiquated syntax. Well, not always, but that was like another time, another Julian Bashir, and he'd never tried Dickens then. But now, he found himself rereading the sentences, unable to take them in the first time through. What was it Dickens was saying about Cock-lane? First a ghost and then a brood of chickens telling prophecies? It made little sense, and he had to read it over again. When the half-hour was up, he hadn't even been able to turn the page.

He closed the book slowly and placed it back on the table. There was a briefing to go to, as usual. He didn't want to be late. But just as the door opened for him, he turned back. He picked up the book and turned it over in his hands, flipping to the back. Conjecture? Yes, of course it was, for Sydney Carton did not have pen or paper to write that day. But it was as clear for him today as the first day he read it, staying up all night because he couldn't stop turning the pages. "'It is a far, far better thing I do,'" he read aloud, "'than I have ever done. It is a far, far better rest I go to than I have ever known.'" He smiled and sighed. He could go to work now.

He arrived with the others at the wardroom. _Good,_ he thought, _I'm not late._ Sisko's face was grim, as usual. _More bad news,_ Bashir decided.

"The _Nathaniel Greene_ was lost with all hands," Sisko announced.

"Just once," complained O'Brien, "can't we have some good news to open a briefing?"

"I wish we could," Sisko replied. "Nova Czeska has called as well. Starfleet Intelligence, too. They want some answers on the _Vesmir_'s demise."

"I have found something," Worf commented. "I'm just not sure what it is yet."

"Figure it out, Commander," Sisko told. "I'll stall them as long as I can. I don't think we have enough evidence or resources to solve the whole riddle, but we need to give Intelligence something they can work with. Get things started and then turn it over to them. We've got enough to do around here." He turned his attention to his Chief of Operations next. "How are the repairs on the _Venture_?"

"Done, sir," the Chief replied. "At least that's good news. She's as

good as new. They can leave anytime they're ready."

"Well, not entirely good," Sisko said. "The Defiant needs to be ready to go, too."

"Where will we be going?" Worf asked.

"Convoy duty. But not for a couple of days. The convoy is still assembling. It will hit our sector in three days. Enjoy the downtime while it lasts, folks."

"The Defiant will be ready, Captain," O'Brien assured him. "No need to worry about that."

"Good to hear," Sisko sighed. "That's all I have this morning."

Bashir used to enjoy the daily briefings among the senior staff. It was a relaxing way to start the day. But then the war had come. Then Sloan and Section 31 had come. And since then, briefings were better the shorter they were. It wasn't just the bad news from the front, the nearly daily list of ships lost or crippled. It was the captain. Bashir just didn't like to be in his presence too long anymore. There was a time when he admired Sisko, but that was before he'd ordered Bashir to hand over eighty-five liters of biomemetic gel. He still had occasional nightmarish daydreams thinking what someone might have done with those eighty-five liters. Something about Sisko had changed when he gave those orders. And something had changed in Bashir when he was forced to carry them out.

And, he had to admit, he'd probably not forgiven the captain for taking his little vacation in New Orleans after Jadzia died. Every night he went to sleep wondering if he'd wake up in his own quarters. He could disappear one day, simply gone from the face of the galaxy and Sisko wouldn't even care. He'd ordered it after all. Bashir was supposed to go along with Sloan when Section 31 came back for him. It went against everything he believed in. But Sisko had ordered it. And then he'd run off, leaving him and the war behind. Bashir had felt that Sisko owed him. Sisko should be here when he disappeared. He deserved to feel guilty when he didn't return.

That was what he was thinking when he rose from his chair and turned to leave. "Doctor," Sisko said, stopping him.

Bashir turned and waited for the door to close behind the others. Sisko stood up and opened his mouth but he didn't say anything. He was trying. Bashir was listening, waiting, hoping. "Never mind," Sisko said. He sat down. "Sorry to keep you."

"Not a problem, sir," Bashir said, not meaning it. "I don't have any patients scheduled this morning anyway." He turned again.

"Oh," Sisko added, "you have some reports due today, I think."

"Finished them last night," Bashir reported. "Though it seems I've forgotten to bring them along. I'll have them sent right up. Anything else, sir?"

"No," Sisko replied. "No, I suppose not."

* * *

><p>It proved to be a slow morning, which left Bashir time to try and decide whether or not he should go on the convoy mission. There was always the chance that the convoy could be attacked. But there was also the chance that nothing would go wrong and he'd be needed here on the station. Captain Sisko hadn't said anything either way. He had almost two days to decide, however, so he put those thoughts on hold before he took his lunch.<p>

He found a patient waiting for him after he returned. Jabara filled him in. "Sore throat, slight fever," she said. "He looks a bit swollen."

Bashir nodded confidently and went in to examine the patient. Crewman Swenson smiled at him weakly.

"How long have you been sore?" Bashir asked, touching the sides of Swenson's neck.

"Started yesterday," he answered, his voice hoarse. "I thought it would just go away."

Bashir nodded. "Open up," he said. Swenson obeyed and Bashir peered into the man's throat. It was bright red in color, with swollen pockets on either side. And, for some reason, Bashir froze. His mind froze in an odd loop. The symptoms were familiar--he'd seen them before--but he couldn't think what the problem was. He knew it should be easy, but his mind just wouldn't surrender the answer.

Trying not to show the rising panic he felt, he ran a couple more tests with the tricorder. Then he politely excused himself and retired to his office. Using the tricorder readings and the symptoms he'd noted, he looked up the diagnosis. The computer found two entries that closely matched the symptoms. They were a tight match, but Bashir was able to decide the correct one on his own. He blushed in embarrassment. Tonsillitis. So simple. And yet, until it had been reduced to a multiple choice question, he'd been unable to come up with it himself. He panicked again, worrying that he'd have to operate. He looked at his hands. They shook ever so slightly. He forced himself to look at the readings again and checked the computer for it's prognosis. Then he sighed, taking a deep breath. Antibiotics would be fine.

"Thank God for computers," he breathed, trying to calm himself. There was no need to alarm the patient. He waited two more minutes for his face to cool down and then checked his reflection. Normal enough. He could see worry behind his eyes, but he knew the others wouldn't. He'd become quite adept at hiding such things.

As he left his office, he gathered the antibiotics and hypospray needed to treat Crewman Swenson. "Sorry to keep you waiting," he apologized on entering the room again. "You've got a mild case of tonsillitis. Nothing to worry about, but it'll get you a day off work."

Swenson smiled. "Aw," he said, "that's a shame."

Bashir returned the smile and pressed the hypospray to Swenson's

neck. "Come back in the morning for another dose, and you'll be right as rain."

"Thanks, Doc." Swenson got up from the biobed and headed for the door.

Bashir accompanied him and clapped him on the shoulder. "My pleasure. Go easy on the voice."

After he was gone, Bashir called Jabara over. "It's a slow day," he said, smiling and trying to appear natural. "Why don't you take the rest of the afternoon off."

"Someone should be here," she started to protest.

He held up a hand. "I'll be here," he assured her. "I promise to call if anything should happen. You deserve the break."

She still eyed him with playful suspicion. "Why are you being so generous?"

"I'm a very nice guy," he said, "and you should take advantage of it while it lasts."

"You'll call?" She still wasn't sure.

He held up both hands in submission. "I give you my word."

"Alright," she finally said. "But I'll be back in two minutes if you need me."

"Go," he ordered, more firmly, but still with the smile.

She went, but threw another look at him over her shoulder before she left. As soon as she was out of sight, Bashir's smile faded. He backed into the examination room and closed the door behind him. He touched a few controls so that no one could disturb him without warning. Then he laid himself down on the biobed. Using the tricorder and the controls above his head, he began running tests.

* * *

><p>Chief Miles O'Brien rounded the last turn before the Infirmary came into view. It was conveniently located almost directly across from Quark's, so they wouldn't have far to go for their game. The Infirmary was quiet and dark when he entered. Bashir's light was on in his office though, so O'Brien knocked on the doorframe and stuck his head in. "More reports?" he asked.<p>

Bashir looked up quickly, as if he'd been startled, but then softened his expression. He touched the control on the display he was using and it went dark. "No," he answered. "Finished them last night. What can I do for you, Miles?"

"Do?" O'Brien shook his head. Julian had been acting a little off lately. But he couldn't place it beyond ascribing it to stress and the war and every other normal reaction someone might have to the events of late. "You promised me a darts game, remember?"

"I did?" Bashir looked genuinely confused. Then it fell away. "I did. Last night."

"Something wrong?" O'Brien asked. "You wouldn't be a changeling again, would you?"

Bashir's eyes narrowed in annoyance. "I've never been a changeling," he asserted, standing. "I've been a prisoner while a changeling was being me. There's a difference."

"Easy," O'Brien backed up a bit. "I was just testing you. You wanna play darts or not? If you're not up to it, it's okay. I'll live."

Bashir sighed and shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't mean to lose my temper. I just get tired of that. I wasn't here. It wasn't me. While everyone here was having a grand time, I was rotting in a Jem'Hadar isolation cell. You'd think having me impersonated by a changeling would be a memorable event."

"It was for me," O'Brien admitted, deciding Bashir wasn't in the mood for teasing.

"People still ask me if I remember this or that," Bashir explained.

O'Brien nodded, not wanting the details. "I can see how that would get old after a month or two, and it's been over a year."

Bashir sighed again, letting his eyes drift back to the now deactivated console. "Stress." His mouth turned up in a half-smile. He looked up. "I don't suppose you'd let me beat you at darts."

O'Brien smiled, too, glad for the change of subject. "Not a chance!"

Bashir laughed and started towards the door. He stopped though and reached back to retrieve a data rod from the computer. "Ready."

* * *

><p>After two rounds of thoroughly awful shots on Bashir's part, O'Brien had agreed to let him step up a few paces. It hadn't helped much. Miles had beat him every game. Bashir joked and smiled throughout, not wanting to worry his friend when he wasn't even sure why he should be so worried himself. Still, he was relieved when they called it a night and he could return to his quarters. Once there, he had activated his computer and accessed the data on the rod he'd saved from the Infirmary. It contained the results from the three hours of tests he'd run on himself-- every test he could think of. There was one overriding result from them all: Normal. He was normal. Nothing was physically wrong with him.<p>

PADDs cluttered his desk and the table in front of the couch. He scrolled through several files on the computer's display. There were anatomy files and physiology files, psychology and neurology. He compared the test results with the files, trying to find some difference. The files, once welcoming and ordered, seemed distant and chaotic to him. A jumble of facts and figures that he had to

concentrate on to understand.

Maybe there was a test he forgot, something else he could do. He read the files one by one, line by line, word for word, searching for the one thing that would provide the answer. But nothing did. Six hours later, he had still come out normal. There was nothing wrong with him.

But something was wrong. He could feel it. He had sensed it when he'd been unable to read Dickens that morning. He'd been forced to face it when Swenson had come in with tonsillitis. The darts game only helped to confirm it. Something was very wrong. Something even the diagnostic computers of the Infirmary couldn't detect. And he only had one idea what it could be.

He remembered things. Things from long ago. Things from before he was enhanced. He was remembering those things more often lately. Mainly because the things that were happening to him were beginning to feel familiar. "Computer," he said, "activate personal log, Julian Bashir, Chief Medical Officer, Deep Space Nine. New entry."

"Beginning new entry," the computer intoned.

"Last year," he began, speaking as if speaking to himself, "when Jack and the others had come for a visit, I had thought myself fortunate in comparison. My parents had found a competent doctor, one who hadn't made a mistake. I hadn't suffered the side effects of the others. I was normal, even if enhanced.

"It appears now that that hypothesis was premature. I have been having trouble lately, with small things. My short term memory appears affected. I have more trouble distinguishing the different sections and levels of the station. My sense of direction is not what it used to be, and I couldn't read Dickens this morning."

He was silent for a moment, but then he continued. "Somewhere in the back of my mind, I've always wondered if the enhancements would come undone. If they could come undone. What would become of me? Would I become the man I was born to be before the enhancements were done? I guess now I'll get to find out.

"I found out about the enhancements when I was fifteen. Not an easy time in anyone's life. Harder still to find out you're a monster. I've resented it, hated it, and loved it at the same time. I could do things, know things, understand things which were previously beyond me. My parents could be proud of me. I could be proud of myself. But I was never unaware of what I was. Never comfortable with it. There were times that I wished it away."

He turned away, but didn't end the log. "Now it seems to be happening. And I want them. I want to keep the enhancements. I want to keep my mind. The enhancements made it better, but I filled it. I've filled it with facts and medical knowledge. I've filled it with ideas and literature. I've filled it with memories and with friends. And I don't want to lose any of them. I can't imagine not being Doctor Bashir, not wearing this uniform, not debating with Garak, not reading books and journals, not trying to figure out the mysteries." He sighed. "I remember it though. I remember it and I don't want to go back there." He straightened. "End log."

3. Part Three

>***Star Trek: Deep Space Nine**

Pain of Memory

By Gabrielle Lawson

>with the generous help of Jo Burgess<p>

Part Three

More nightmares than usual plagued him that night as he slept, and he awoke feeling that he'd had no rest at all. The Dickens book glared at him from its spot near Kukalaka on the shelf. "Maybe the computers are right," he argued at the book. "Maybe it's nothing. Just stress. I've got a lot of reasons to be stressed." Feeling no better, he stepped out the door. He paused for a moment there, trying to orient himself. He closed his eyes, blocking out the confusing corridors, and remembered. He opened his eyes again and walked right to the corridor that would take him over to the wardroom.

The briefing was thankfully short, with nothing new to report except the usual lost ships and casualties. The Klingon border was heating up. Martok was going back out. The Defiant was prepared to leave the next evening for convoy duty. The Enirak was still a mystery. The briefing broke up in a little over a quarter of an hour. Odo shared the turbolift with Bashir as they went down to the Promenade. There was little to say though, and, thankfully, Odo wasn't the most conversational of people. Bashir didn't feel like talking, so they rode the lift in silence and were deposited on the lower level of the Promenade without having said a word to each other. Odo nodded as he turned off to the Security office and Bashir was alone again, though the Promenade was already crowded.

The Infirmary was not far away and he felt a panic rise up his stomach. Dear God, he prayed silently, though he really didn't know if there was such a thing, please don't let there be any patients today. He stepped toward the door and it opened.

Nurse Jabara was already there and she smiled. "Good morning!"

Bashir forced a smile and returned her greeting, but he was really looking around the Infirmary. There was no one else there. He felt a wave of relief. "I have some paperwork to do today," he lied. "I'll be in my office if you need me."

An hour later there was a chime at his door and he jumped. "Come in," he choked out.

Jabara stuck her head in. "Crewman Swenson has returned."

Bashir forced himself to breathe, to act normal. "Alright," he said, smiling. "I'll be right out."

She left and his mind raced. She had said 'returned.' Crewman Swenson had been in before. Yesterday. He remembered now and chastised himself. How could he forget? He called up his medical logs from the day before. He found Swenson's name and the notes he'd made.

Tonsillitis. A second dose of antibiotics was needed. He sighed. He could do that. He pushed himself up out of the chair and out of the office. He found Swenson sitting on a biobed.

"Feeling better?" Bashir asked, trying to sound cheerful, as he reached for the hypospray. He double-checked the name on the antibiotics before he loaded the hypospray, making sure that it was the right one.

Swenson smiled. "Much," he said. "My throat feels fine today."

"Well," Bashir replied as he placed the hypospray to Swenson's neck. "This should do it for you then."

"I guess that means I have to go back to work, huh?" Swenson teased.

Bashir let his false smile widen. "I'm afraid so."

Swenson left and Bashir returned to the safety of his office. He made sure he filled out a report right away, before he could forget or get confused. He spent the rest of the day as a recluse, going over files as he had the night before. There had to be something in them. But today, the files were harder to read, the information more distant, like a secret code he didn't have the key to. Anatomy was the easiest. More figures and graphs than the others. He studied the anatomy of the most common species on the station and hoped that none of them would come walking through the door with so much as a stomach ache.

* * *

><p>It was still early when he entered the Habitat Ring, and he felt glad that the corridors were fairly empty. Most people were still out, on duty or on the Promenade, relaxing at the end of the workday. He turned the last corner and nearly walked into the door when it didn't open for him. He was just about to ask the computer about that little glitch when he noted the number beside the door. It wasn't his quarters. He was at least two sections away. How did that happen? he wondered. It wasn't like he didn't know the way to his own quarters.

When he reentered the main corridor, he felt a little dizzy. It all looked right. _Of course, it does,_ he told himself. The station was symmetrical. In general, one section looked like any other on the same deck. He felt a moment's panic when he couldn't decide whether he needed to go right or left to reach his section. _Left,_ he reasoned finally, deciding he was much too tired and should probably skip dinner altogether in favor of sleep.

A second time, he thought he'd come to his quarters, but the numbers were still wrong. Finally, he decided to just read the numbers and follow them that way. He found his quarters easily enough then, though he had to walk for another ten minutes. He was grateful when his door obediently opened before him. Kukalaka's stuffed gaze met his own when he entered, confirming this as home. "Good to see you," he told the little bear. "You wouldn't believe the night I've been having."

* * *

><p>That night, once he was back in his quarters, was no different from the previous, though he was less sure now that it was his enhancements. And then five minutes later, he'd be more certain that it was. He couldn't decide. He awoke in the morning with a sense of dread. Another day. He'd been lucky the day before. There were more than a thousand people on the station. There would be a patient today. He shook slightly and forced himself to be calm. But the doubts still plagued him. What if the patient was critical? He was afraid he wouldn't be able to handle it. He'd gone over and over medical texts for the last two days, trying to reinforce what he knew he already knew. But he still wasn't sure.<p>

And then there was guilt. He hadn't told anyone yet. It was wrong to keep it a secret. He was the doctor. He had a responsibility. The whole station counted on him, and now he couldn't be counted on. He should step down, at least temporarily, until the whole problem got sorted out.

If it ever got sorted out. He'd run so many tests already. As far as he could tell, he'd still come out normal. He had tried to find another explanation beyond the enhancements, but he couldn't. It had been nagging at him all during the restless night. He was coming undone. Who was he to think that he was better than Jack and Patrick and the other 'mutants'? He had thought himself lucky. Now his arrogance was mocking him. He was no better. His days of glory were over before they'd ever really gotten going. He was coming undone. He was born slow, unable to understand even simple things. He was returning to that level.

But he knew what to do about it. He could resign. But not in front of everyone. He'd wait until the briefing was over and he could be alone with Sisko. He'd been prepared to do it before. He could do it now. He would leave the station quietly and just disappear. No one needed to know. He'd go home.

That decided, he finished dressing and let the door to his quarters open. He closed his eyes against the wave of dizziness that hit him as soon as he saw the corridors. He concentrated hard, remembering the path to the wardroom. He could see it in his mind. He'd traveled that way so many times before. He opened his eyes and followed the memories down the corridor.

He was the last to enter, but he was only just behind Odo and Kira. "Good morning," Sisko said when everyone sat down. "We've got a busy day, so let's get down to business. Worf?"

"I think I found it, Captain," Worf answered. He handed a PADD to Sisko. "But I'd think fresh opinions would be better."

Sisko read over the PADD and nodded. "Good work, Commander." He passed the PADD to O'Brien. "Do you concur with his analysis?" he asked O'Brien. Then he addressed everyone at the briefing. "I want all of you to take a look at this. See what you make of it. We have to be certain."

O'Brien read over the PADD, nodded to the captain, and then passed it to Ezri. His face had grown a shade more pale. Ezri's brows furrowed, but she said nothing. She handed the PADD to Kira. Kira read it and

her shoulders dropped. It was the only clue she gave to the contents of the PADD. But Bashir assumed it had something to do with the _Vesmir,_ since Worf had been working on that for a few weeks now.

Finally, the PADD came to Bashir. He scrolled back to the top of the document and peered closely at it. And then he froze. He focused on the first word there. He could see the letters, even name them. The first was an 'A.' But he couldn't make out the word. A sense of panic gripped him and he stood. Every head in the room turned toward him, but he hardly noticed. His eyes were still riveted on the first word on the PADD. "Julian?" he heard O'Brien ask in concern. Only then did he realize they were watching him. But things had just spiraled out of his control. The whole world, as he knew it, had just come to an end. He couldn't speak. Couldn't explain. He couldn't think about anything but that first word and the end of everything else. He bolted from the room.

* * *

><p>Sisko watched each face as they read the PADD. The Cardassians--and by default, the Dominion--were working on a cloaking device. And they were trying to use Gidari technology to get it. That was his own reading of the analysis by Worf. He would see if the others agreed. The implications were big. Cloaks could only make the already powerful alliance more dangerous. On the other hand, the destruction of the Enirak meant they were, so far, unsuccessful in their attempts. But the Gidari material found in the debris could mean the Gidari were entering the conflict.

O'Brien nodded. He saw a cloak in it as well. He handed the the PADD to Ezri, who read it and passed it to Kira. Her shoulders dropped. She saw the threat, too. Odo merely grunted, which could mean just about anything with him. Bashir took him completely by surprise. Bashir stared hard at the PADD and then stood. Sisko would have guessed he was in shock. "Julian?" O'Brien asked. Bashir looked up, his eyes filled with terror. Then he bolted from the room, taking the PADD with him.

Sisko had not expected such a reaction out of anyone, least of all Bashir. The information on the PADD was important, but not immediately drastic. Nothing worth terror like that anyway. "Mr. Worf," he said, pushing up from his chair, "carry on without me."

"Sir," O'Brien stood, too. "I'd like to come."

Sisko knew they were friends. But something was obviously very wrong with the doctor. One person chasing him down was probably enough. "Not this time, Chief," he replied, softly. "Worf needs your input. I'll let you know."

Now Ezri stood up. "Maybe I should go." She was the counselor after all.

"Not this time, Old Man," Sisko insisted. He left the wardroom and contacted the computer from the corridor. "Computer, locate Doctor Julian Bashir."

"Doctor Bashir is in Turbolift Seven."

Sisko sighed and took off in the direction of Turbolift Seven. The doors opened immediately when he approached them. No one was inside. Bashir was already gone, but his comm badge was on the floor of the lift. He didn't want to be found. Sisko felt a twinge of doubt mixed with worry. Maybe Section 31 had taken this as an opportunity to snatch him from the station again. He shook it off. That didn't explain Bashir's reaction to the PADD. Sisko couldn't really think of anything that did.

Ordinarily, it would be nearly impossible to find someone without a comm badge on. But since Sisko didn't see the PADD on the floor, he assumed Bashir still had it. "Computer, locate PADD G4."

"PADD G4 is in Runabout Pad E."

Another twinge. Bashir was a changeling again, trying to leave the station. But that one didn't wash either. That runabout pad was currently empty. The runabouts were out on maneuvers today. "Take me to Runabout Pad E," he ordered the computer. The turbolift began to move.

The viewscreen outside the pad showed only darkness. If Bashir was in there, he hadn't turned on the lights. Sisko turned on a few of the lights from where he was. It was enough to see by, but hopefully not enough to further disturb the doctor. He tried the airlock door. It was locked. "Computer, override," he ordered, "Authorization Sisko one alpha seven." There was a moment while the computer processed the request. It was a short moment, no more than a few seconds, but it was long enough for Sisko to worry that Bashir may have bypassed his security authorization. Bashir was intelligent, more so than he often seemed. And he often seemed brilliant. He could lock anyone out if he put his mind to it. But the door opened. Sisko stepped through and expected to find the next door locked as well. It opened obediently before him though, and he entered the dimly lit runabout pad.

* * *

><p>It was a large area, but Bashir was not hard to find. He was sitting in the corner, still holding the PADD. But he wasn't looking at it. His head was leaning back against the wall. He stared at the dark ceiling and didn't even move when Sisko came in. "I thought maybe," he spoke quietly, "maybe I was just tired, or . . . or maybe over-stressed."<p>

Besides the slight stutter, Bashir's words were calm, the complete opposite of his reaction in the wardroom. Sisko walked gently, not wanting the sound of his boots to disturb the quiet in the pad. "What's wrong, Julian?" And he realized he hadn't used the doctor's first name in months. What had happened between them? Sisko felt it was his own fault. He knew it was. But there were things which took precedence. Ordinarily. For now, Bashir was the priority.

Julian looked at him finally, his eyes searching, seeking truth. "Do you think you'd notice if you lost your mind?"

"Is it the Dominion?" Sisko asked. Maybe it was Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Maybe he should have sent Dax down here.

But there was no visible reaction. "What about them?" Bashir

asked.

Sisko had reached his side now. He pointed down at the PADD in Bashir's hand. "The PADD. Did it make you remember something? Something you didn't want to remember?"

Bashir's eyebrows knit in confusion and then he looked at the PADD again. "The PADD," Bashir repeated, but the phrase held no answer for Sisko. "Is that what it says? I can't read it."

Sisko shook his head. "What do you mean you can't read it?"

"I mean I can't," Bashir told him. "I look at the letters, but I can't make them into words. I can't read."

Sisko sat down, still not understanding how a man could simply stop being able to read. Bashir was still holding the PADD up and Sisko could read it from where he sat. Bashir looked over at him, letting the hand that was holding the PADD fall. "You'll need another doctor."

Sisko didn't want to give up that easily. The situation still didn't make sense. "I already have a doctor. I have you."

Bashir shook his head. "I can't. I can't read; I can't be a doctor."

Sisko still wouldn't accept it. "You said yourself you were tired. Maybe overstressed." He took the PADD from Bashir and set it aside. "Maybe you should talk to Ezri, take a few days off. Everything will be fine, you'll see." He didn't completely believe it himself.

"It's not going away," Bashir told him. "I thought it would, but it hasn't. It's only getting worse. I was going to resign anyway."

That hit hard. But Sisko ignored it to get at the sentence before. "How has it gotten worse?" Sisko asked, hoping that now he'd get a more detailed explanation for his doctor's behavior.

Bashir's head dropped and his voice filled with emotion. Sorrow, anguish. "I don't know," he said. "I thought it would go away, that it would get better. I ran tests, as many as I could think of. But there's nothing wrong with me. The tests all came back normal. I didn't tell anyone. I should have. No one was sick. Someone could have died."

It was too much, too fast. Sisko couldn't follow Bashir's confession. "Slow down. Tell me what's wrong. Why did you run tests?"

Bashir shook his head. "I don't know when it started," he said. "but no one was sick. There wasn't anything to do to find out. But then Swenson came in." His head lifted, but he stared straight ahead. "Tonsilitis. I had to look it up. I actually had to look it up."

Sisko was starting to understand. Bashir put himself under a lot of pressure. He was a brilliant doctor, but he expected perfection from himself. "So you had to look something up. That's not that bad, Julian. I'm sure everyone does sometime."

"I was so afraid," Bashir continued as if he hadn't heard, "that I'd have to operate. I couldn't think how. So I ran some tests. But I couldn't find anything wrong. I thought, I'm just tired. But it got worse. I almost got lost. Just going back to my quarters. All the corridors look the same. I had to watch the numbers on the doors. Now this." He looked Sisko in the eyes. "I'm losing my mind. Not my sanity, but my mind."

Sisko leaned his head back against the wall, too. It made sense, once he'd worked through everything Bashir had said. It made sense, and it didn't. Why would a person, a brilliant person like Bashir, suddenly have problems like this? He couldn't explain it anymore than Bashir could. "We'll run more tests," he said. It was the only thing he could think to do. "I'll call Starfleet and get another doctor out here. For now, just go back to your quarters and try and get some rest." Then he remembered what Bashir had said about getting lost. "I'll walk you there. Try not to worry. We'll find what's wrong, and we'll find a way to help you."

He stood and held out a hand to help the doctor up. Bashir didn't say another word as they walked to the Habitat Ring. And he only nodded when Sisko dropped him off at his quarters. As the doors closed, Sisko had a realization. Bashir had broken. Five weeks in the Dominion internment camp hadn't broken him. Being abducted by the Federation-- thanks to Section 31--hadn't managed to take away all of his spirit. But this, whatever it was, had done just that.

* * *

><p>O'Brien tried to pay attention to the briefing, but it seemed to be coming to an end anyway. Everyone left concurred that it looked as if the Cardassians were trying to create a cloaking device using Gidari technology of some sort. It was an experiment, which would explain the relatively small crew compliment as reported by Garak. It didn't entirely solve the puzzle created by the destruction of the Enirak, because no one knew if the Gidari had cloaking technology or not. They'd never demonstrated it, and no one had ever caught them with it. And that might have been the Cardassians' biggest mistake here. The Gidari, and all their technology, were unknowns. You don't risk your entire crew and ship on something as unknown as the Gidari. The destruction of the _Enirak_-- and of the _Vesmir_--was a good proof of that.

Beyond all that, there was little for the crew of Deep Space Nine to do about it. They could pass the information along to Starfleet Intelligence and keep their eyes out for more ships like the _Enirak_. That was about it. Hopefully, O'Brien thought with a good bit of cynicism, they'll keep trying the Gidari stuff. Might make the war shorter.

That settled in his mind, he was back to wondering about Julian. Julian hadn't quite seemed himself these last weeks, but that was nothing that couldn't be explained away as stress or war-weariness of some sort. But his reaction to the PADD was off the scale. He was relieved then, when the door to the wardroom opened.

His heart sank a bit when the captain entered alone. Bashir wasn't with him, and the look on his face was a grim one. "Well?" the captain asked when everyone looked expectantly to him. "What did you come up with?"

Worf answered, reporting for everyone. "A cloak. They were working on a cloaking device, most likely something they were trying to glean from Gidari technology."

Sisko nodded, sitting down at the head of the table. He had the PADD with him and tossed it onto the table. "And we can't really do anything about it except keep alert." Heads nodded around the table. "Commander Worf, please apprise Starfleet Command of the situation." He took a deep breath. O'Brien was holding his, waiting for word about Julian. "Colonel, please contact Starfleet Medical. We'll need a new doctor."

"What?!" O'Brien practically jumped out of his chair. "Why do we need a new doctor?"

"Settle down, Chief," Sisko told him, looking him straight in the eye. He kept his voice calm. "Julian requested it. I'm hoping it's only temporary." He turned his attention back to Kira. "Doctor Girani can take over until Starfleet sends someone."

O'Brien had sat down again, telling himself over and over that Bashir was not being railroaded. Sisko wouldn't do that. "What's wrong with him?"

Sisko shook his head and steepled his fingers together while his elbows rested on the table. "I don't know. He couldn't read the PADD. That's what upset him. All of a sudden, he can't read."

"That doesn't make any sense," Ezri remarked, shaking her head as well.

"I'm inclined to agree, Old Man," Sisko told her. "But it's happened just the same. I'd like to find out why, which is why I want a good neurologist. A very good neurologist." He sighed heavily. He turned to Kira again. "He said he ran some tests but couldn't find anything wrong. Find the results and make sure the neurologist gets them when he or she arrives."

Kira nodded.

"Chief," Sisko turned to O'Brien. He sighed, and O'Brien knew he was leaving Bashir behind. Duty calls. "Make sure the Defiant is staffed and ready for departure by 2000 hours. We still have a convoy to run. Dismissed."

4. Part Four

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Four****

Julian sat on his couch staring at the wall. He hadn't moved since

Captain Sisko had deposited him there over two hours before. He was so flooded with emotion that he was beyond thought. He was afraid. He was depressed. He was frustrated and bewildered. But he was also ashamed. Ashamed that he'd had to be led to his own quarters, that he had made such a spectacle of himself at the briefing, that he might have endangered a patient by keeping this to himself as long as he had.

Finally, exhausted emotionally and lost to his own mind, he fell asleep. He dreamed, but his dreams were more a mangle of memories and fears, unstructured and boiling, flitting from image to image. Some of the memories were his, Julian's. Some belonged to Jules, the boy from whom Julian had been created. They seemed to fight for dominance. Julian's memories claimed prominence by sheer weight of numbers. Jules' memories claimed birthright.

By the time the door chime rang, neither had gained the upper hand. For a moment, in his disorientation, he wasn't sure what the chime was or how to stop it. But as he forced himself to push up off the couch, he found his thoughts again. "Come in," he whispered, not feeling the strength to say it any louder.

The computer must have heard. The door opened.

"I'm sorry," Miles O'Brien said, stepping through the door. "Did I wake you?"

Bashir slumped back against the couch, relieved to see his friend. But he didn't know what to say, so he just nodded. It was awkward, even with O'Brien. What could he say? O'Brien would ask if he was alright, and the truthful answer would be that he wasn't.

"Are you alright?"

There it was. Bashir just looked at him.

"Guess not," O'Brien answered his own question. He found a chair at the table and pulled it over near the coffee table. "I know," he said. "It was a stupid question. Captain Sisko told us what happened." He paused, looking away. "Well, not _what_ happened exactly. He said you couldn't read."

Finally, Bashir found his voice. "I could yesterday." His voice was still quiet, but it came through. It took a great deal of effort to speak, not because it was physically hard, but because he felt his energy had drained away with his ability to read. And the reading was just an outward sign of something more terrible. Energy had to have a purpose, and he felt that all purpose he might have had was being sapped away by whatever was taking his mind. "I had trouble with Dickens, but I could read the words."

"What do you suppose is wrong?" Miles was watching him again, his brow furrowed in concern. There were no jokes this time, no pretenses. Just honest friendship.

Julian shook his head. "I don't know. It's like I can't think straight- -or I can't think at all. Like there are holes in what I used to know."

"And the tests you ran?"

"Normal." Bashir sighed again, and felt it a waste of breath. "It's like the world has become inaccessible. It feels like before."

"Before what?"

"Before Adigeon Prime," Julian explained, letting the words out despite his overall weariness. "It's all slipping away. I can feel myself falling back there."

"Is that possible?" O'Brien asked, and Bashir could tell he was already looking for a loophole, a way around the problem--whatever it was. "Can you? . . ." He struggled for the right words.

Bashir supplied them. "Come undone? I don't know. This has never happened to me before."

"Well," O'Brien said, standing up and moving to the computer. "I meant. . . ." He stopped again. "Maybe it's happened to someone else."

"Who?" Bashir asked, realizing O'Brien was only trying to help, but unable to stop himself from shooting down the offer of hope O'Brien was reaching for. "People don't just admit to being enhanced."

O'Brien gave up on the computer, but he kept his patience. "Captain Sisko had Kira send for someone from Bajor. Maybe it's just some sort of virus or something physical. Maybe it's a delayed effect from that Lethian thing."

Lethian. Bashir hadn't thought about that. He remembered the Lethian. It was years ago, but he remembered the attack, the feeling of electricity coursing through his head, the hallucination that had followed, waking up from the coma to see a very surprised Jadzia Dax and Sisko over his bed. He remembered. Could it be a side effect? Few people survived such attacks. Could his survival have come at a price? He thought again of the actual attack, and felt the familiarity, the nearness of the electricity. But he couldn't say it was the cause. He had run tests back then, too. There were no lingering effects.

Finally, he looked up into his friend's face. "What's going to happen to me, Miles?"

O'Brien opened his mouth, but then closed it again. He tried once more, setting his face with resolution. "You're going to get better, that's what."

"And if I don't?" Bashir really wanted to know. He couldn't stay, he knew that. He couldn't be a doctor. He couldn't be a Starfleet officer. Not like this. "If I have to leave, I want to go home."

"You can't think like that, Julian," O'Brien scolded. "You have to have hope."

Bashir surprised himself with his candidness. "I'm running out of hope, Miles."

"Well, don't," O'Brien ordered. "We still need you."

* * *

><p>Captain Sisko had thought about stopping in to visit with his former Chief Medical Officer before he left on the Defiant. Dr. Hensing had arrived soon after lunch though. Hensing was transferred from the USS Shiloh with high recommendations from his superiors. Sisko had met him at the airlock, much as he had Bashir six years earlier. There couldn't have been a greater contrast between the two of them. Bashir was young--just graduated. Hensing was graying at the temples. Bashir was outgoing and nervous, stuttering when he was unsure of himself. Hensing was too sure of himself, and he barely opened his mouth except to try and cover a snarl as he surveyed his new surroundings. Bashir had looked with wonder and excitement at even his trashed, tattered, and vandalized Infirmary. Hensing had a look of disdain, a slight turning down of the lips, when he took in the crisp, ordered, well- equipped Infirmary he'd inherited from his predecessor.

He seemed relieved when, three hours later, he left the Infirmary and Bashir in Doctor Girani's care and stepped aboard the Defiant.

And that was the reason Sisko had not stopped in to visit Bashir, whom he still hoped was only suffering a temporary ailment of some sort. Or at least, that was the excuse he gave himself. But he also admitted to himself that he'd had all morning--before Hensing had come. He'd had the time. Just not the will.

Or was it courage? What could he have said to Bashir? They hadn't said more than a few dozen words to each other--outside of duty--since he'd returned from New Orleans.

There was a time when he'd called Bashir a friend. But something had built a wall between them--or they'd each built it together. Sisko knew why he had laid his own bricks and the side effect was that Julian had laid bricks in response. Sisko's bricks were made of guilt. Guilt he accepted as his payment for the Romulans entering the war. He could never admit it--especially to Julian. He had been forced to use Bashir. More guilt. More payment. But Bashir was only one man. The war with the Dominion would take many more.

"Ensign Nog," he ordered, double-checking the ship's status, "take us out."

* * *

><p>Julian Bashir was rather glad when Doctor Hensing left. He knew the doctor had been transferred to DS Nine to replace him. He was the one who told Sisko to do it. But he still resented the proprietary way that Hensing had moved around equipment in the Infirmary--his Infirmary. He didn't like the way Hensing had complained about it or gave orders to his staff. This place was home to him; the staff was his family. It didn't feel right seeing someone else in possession of his home or lording over his family. And Hensing had made no effort to hide his disdain for his first patient, who also happened to be his predecessor.<p>

Doctor Girani was better. She was from Bajor and had been stationed

on DS Nine for awhile. She and he had worked well together in the past. She didn't seem to feel a need to take over anything, and she didn't care if Bashir was genetically enhanced or not. She only wanted to help, to do her duty as a doctor. That was, fortunately, one thing Bashir couldn't fault Hensing for. He did his duty whether he liked his patient or not. And two doctors were better than one, he supposed. But he was still relieved when Hensing was called away to the _Defiant_.

He was left alone with Doctor Girani, an amiable, if serious, woman. She spoke to Julian while she ran the tests, sometimes about Julian and his perception of his condition, and other times about life in her home province on Bajor. Yet, when the computer informed them that it was 2100 hours, Doctor Girani had still not found the cause of Bashir's problem. In fact, just as with the tests Julian had run himself, everything came up normal. According to the computer, there was nothing physically wrong with Bashir. Hensing, while he had remained aboard the station, had come to the same conclusions.

"Well," Girani said, holding out a hand to Bashir and helping him to sit up. "I haven't been able to find anything wrong with you. We've been at it for hours. I think it's time to call it a night. I've spoken to Counselor Dax--" Bashir sighed loudly, which caused Girani to stop and rethink what she was saying. "I'm not saying that what is happening is psychosomatic or anything. I believe your problem is real. But if we can't find any physical reasons for it, I think we should look to mental reasons. If we want to find the solution, we have to look at all the possibilities. Agreed?"

Bashir sighed again. He really didn't like seeing Ezri as a counselor. You had to open up for counselors to do any good, and O'Brien had been right the other night. He had learned to keep things secret. It made it hard, even unpleasant, to open up. Still, he couldn't find fault in what Girani was saying. It made a lot of sense. "Agreed," he said quietly. "You don't think it could be a side effect of the enhancements? Something gone wrong with them? Or maybe, my friend suggested it might be something left over from a Lethian attack several years ago."

Girani seemed to consider those for a moment. "You go see Dax in the morning, and I'll go over the results from the tests we took today and see if anything fits those hypotheses. Deal?"

"Deal," Bashir said, shaking Girani's hand. He didn't feel any better however. They were, as yet, no closer to finding an answer, and very far from finding a solution. In fact, Julian was beginning to think more and more that there was no solution.

Girani turned away and Jabara approached. "May I have the honor of walking you home?" she asked with a smile. He could see the sincerity in her eyes. She was trying to be nice, to show she hadn't forgotten about him or moved on just because he'd been replaced. It was very thoughtful, but it wasn't enough.

"Thank you," Julian told her, "but I think I'd rather be alone right now. I'll just look for the numbers. I'll find it." He got down off the bed and started for the door.

"Doctor?" she called after him.

He turned. "There's not much point in calling me that anymore," he told her.

She met him at the door. "I'll always call you that," she replied. "You've earned it." She took his hand in hers and locked her eyes with his. "Don't let this discourage you. This may look bad now, but you shouldn't give up hope. I'm Bajoran. We know about hope. You should listen to me on this."

She smiled and he couldn't help but smile, too. But it was a sad smile. "I'm sorry I'm leaving you to Hensing."

"You're not leaving us," she said. "Besides, I've had worse." She kissed him on the cheek. "And I've definitely had better."

"I could never have lasted here without you," he told her.

"I know," she replied. "Now, go get something to eat. Then try and rest. Your appointment with Dax is at 0900 hours. I'll have the computer remind you."

"Thanks." He left her then and couldn't help but feel that the Promenade looked different now. It didn't really, he knew. It had to be the same as it was earlier that morning or the day before. But he felt like an outsider now, like he didn't belong anymore.

He had a moment's panic when he couldn't decide which airlock to take to get to the Habitat Ring closest to his quarters. He regretted not having taken Jabara up on her offer of escort. But it was too late now. He couldn't see the Infirmary from where he was. He closed his eyes, trying the technique that had worked that morning. He remembered the way, he was sure of it. He could see images. Odo's office, the airlock, the crossover bridge and the Habitat Ring. But he couldn't quite see if the airlock was the one nearest Odo's office, or if the section of the Habitat Ring was his section.

They all led to the Habitat Ring, he reasoned. He can get to it. Then he can just look for the numbers that identified his quarters. He might have to walk around the whole ring, but he'd find it eventually.

An hour later, he still hadn't found his quarters and panic was building. What if he weren't even on the right level? Maybe he didn't remember his section. The corridor ahead of him was deserted, just as it was behind him. There was no one to help. He sat down, leaning back against the wall, and tried to calm himself. He closed his eyes, trying to remember the numbers on his door, but they were fuzzy and he couldn't make them out. He reached up and touched a panel on the wall. "Computer," he said, trying to keep his voice low, "locate Doctor Bashir's quarters."

The computer began to answer, "Doctor Bashir's quarters are located at Habitat Level--"

Another voice drowned out the computer's. "Doctor?"

Julian turned to see Jake Sisko. He had a confused, concerned look about him. He seemed taller, too, as he caught up to Bashir. But Bashir decided it was just because he felt smaller today. Or maybe he

was, in fact, smaller. If the enhancements were coming undone, it was a possibility, he guessed. He wasn't sure if it was actually possible to shrink or not.

"Are you alright?" Jake asked.

Bashir was jolted back to the present and the corridor that looked like all the other corridors. He decided to be honest. Pride be damned. He was hungry and tired and only wanted to be home. He needed Jake's help. "No, I'm not alright."

Jake suddenly looked nervous and he pushed his hands into his pockets. "I, uh, heard about. . . ."

"I'm sure everyone has by now," Bashir told him. "Or they will soon enough."

"You're lost, aren't you?" Jake asked, sitting down beside him.

Julian felt nervous too, but he had made up his mind. He needed someone and Jake was right there. "Yes. I can't find my quarters. Everything looks the same."

"I know," Jake said, smiling and seeming a bit more at ease. "I felt the same way when I first got here. I can walk with you, if you like."

Bashir sighed with a measure of relief. He still felt awkward having to be dependent on someone, especially someone as young as Jake. But the fact was, at the moment, he was dependent. "Thank you, Jake."

Jake smiled and stood up, extending a hand to help Bashir up. "It's the least I could do. I remember you once walking outside with me after a rather long day filled with blood and death."

"I remember," Bashir said, deciding he didn't want Jake to go into detail. He did remember their little adventure together on Ajilon Prime when the Klingons were attacking.

With Jake leading the way, they reached Bashir's quarters in less than ten minutes. The door slid open and Bashir was relieved to see the familiar furnishings and Kukalaka welcoming him.

But Jake didn't leave right away. "Do you have anywhere to go tomorrow?" he asked.

"I have to see Dax at," he began, but lost his words. What time? "At. . . ."

"Maybe I could come by and walk you there," Jake suggested. "You know, I'm not doing anything else. I write. I don't have duty shifts like everyone else. I can help. If you need to go someplace and you need help, you could just call me." And then he added, with a smile, "I could be your valet."

Julian thought about it. One person. He wouldn't have to ask anyone else. Just one. And he was a friend. Then he remembered. "The computer!" he said. "Jabara said she'd have the computer remind me."

Jake, do you want some dinner?" It seemed silly for them to stand there in the corridor.

Jake's smile widened. "Sure."

Once inside, Jake seemed to take to the duties he'd set for himself. "Computer," he said, "review Doctor Bashir's schedule for tomorrow."

"One appointment," the computer intoned. "0900 hours. Counselor Dax."

"0900," Bashir repeated dourly. "That should be easy to remember."

"I can remember for you," Jake suggested eagerly.

"Why?" Bashir asked, suddenly giving Jake his full attention. "Why do you want to do this? Do you think it will be good for a story?"

Jake dropped his smile and went back to being nervous. "No," he was quick to say. "I won't write a thing about it, honest." He held up one hand to show his sincerity. "I just want to help, that's all. We . . . we work together. We have. Sometimes. You need help, and I can help. I'm just being nice, that's all."

"I didn't mean to sound angry," Julian said, trying to calm him. "I'm . . . I don't like this. I don't like not being able to find my quarters or forgetting where I'm supposed to be tomorrow. Or waking up and not being able to read. This is hard."

"I understand that," Jake said, stepping forward, "which is why I want to help. You've helped me when I was sick. Someone should help you when you're sick."

Bashir had been leaning back against the table. He leaned forward now and stood up. "I wish it was as simple as being sick. What would you like to eat?"

"Whatever you're having would be fine." Jake sat down on the couch then. "Did the doctors find out what was wrong?"

Bashir finished ordering his food from the replicator and then answered. "No. All the tests came out normal. That's why I'm supposed to see Dax. See if it's something in my head."

"They don't think you're imagining it, do they?" Jake asked, leaning forward.

"I don't know about Hensing," Bashir answered as he removed the plates from the replicator and placed them on the table. He motioned for Jake to join him there. "I don't think he likes me. Girani says she believes me. Can you come by tomorrow, before my appointment?"

Jake smiled. "Yeah, ten minutes before. Will that be enough?"

"I don't know," Bashir answered. "I don't know where Dax's office is."

5. Part Five

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Five****

Doctor Hensing sighed as he entered his quarters. They were tiny, more so than on any other starship he'd been posted to. Still, he was glad for the brightness of the walls. The gray of the station was not appealing to him. Besides, he liked being on a starship. At least then he was moving. The station was too stationary. He liked to be on the move.

Either way, he was exhausted. Despite Bashir's present state, he had been a brilliant doctor. And that brilliance--artificial or not--meant that he had left extensive notes on just about everything, which Hensing was now responsible for reviewing in order to treat the large number of residents and transients of the station. There was, of course, a smaller population on the Defiant, but there were still plenty of files to go through for the ship. That and there were wounded from the skirmish earlier in the day. Between those two factors, he'd been busy since he first stepped onboard the little ship. Maybe the workload had finally rattled Bashir too much. He hadn't found anything physically wrong with the man.

It was late now, nearly midnight. He'd gotten all the patients stabilized for now and left word with the staff in Sickbay to call him if they needed him. They seemed a competent bunch. He supposed they had to be. Bashir had been Chief Medical Officer of both Deep Space Nine and the Defiant. One or the other had had to do without him at any given time. The staff missed Bashir, though, that was clear. Hensing had never liked stepping into a new post, especially if the previous doctor was well-liked. He preferred starting out fresh with his staff. One just can't compete with the predecessor in situations like this. The staff was polite enough, but Hensing sensed they were all hoping Bashir would be back someday. He hoped so, too. He wanted a starship.

"You take what you get," he told himself as he climbed up onto the top bunk, "when you're in Starfleet. Computer, lights out."

Fifteen minutes later the call came. "Sickbay to Doctor Hensing."

Hensing groaned but answered the call. "Hensing here. What's the problem?"

"Ensign Wagner, Doctor. He's waking up."

Hensing smiled. Wagner had been in a coma since his head injury four hours earlier. "Good," he said. "His vitals back up to normal?"

"Yes, Doctor, except blood pressure is a little low."

"How--" He was going to ask how low, but a high-pitched whine stopped him. "What's that?" he asked aloud, momentarily forgetting the comm line was open.

"What's what, Doctor?" the nurse asked on the other end.

"It stopped," Hensing told her. "Never mind, how low is Wagner's press--" That was as far as he got. The words stuck in his throat when the first shock hit. His fingers clutched the edges of the thin mattress beneath him. The bunk lit up; he lit up. He could actually see the tendrils of electricity as they forked around him. But he couldn't call out for help. He couldn't even get a breath, though he tried.

"Doctor?" the nurse's voice was now excited. "Doctor?"

But Hensing didn't answer. The electricity receded and he fell to the floor, unconscious.

* * *

><p>"What happened?" Sisko asked, looking down at the unconscious doctor. He couldn't help thinking that he was losing too many of them these days. And in such strange ways.<p>

"I don't know," the nurse told him. "I was talking to him over the comm system, updating him on one of the patients. He got distracted at one point, but I couldn't tell what it was. Then he seemed to choke. When he didn't answer, I sent a medical team to him. They found him unconscious on the floor. But besides bruises, supposedly from falling out of his bunk, I can't find anything wrong with him. No head trauma, no nothing. He shouldn't be unconscious."

"You tried stimulants?" he suggested.

She shook her head. "Only mild ones," she said. "No effect. I'm afraid to try anything stronger since we don't know what we're dealing with."

Sisko placed his hands on the foot of the biobed. He leaned over toward the nurse. His voice now held a slightly conspiratorial tone. "What would Bashir do?" he asked.

She smiled for a moment and then sighed. "He's stable, nothing apparently wrong with him. I think Doctor Bashir would wait for him to wake up and ask him what happened."

Sisko straightened and nodded. "Fine. Notify me as soon as he wakes up."

* * *

><p>"0830 hours," the computer intoned. "You have one appointment. 0900 hours. Counselor Dax."<p>

Julian Bashir's eyes flew open and the last images of the nightmare faded away. The lightning dreams had been gone for awhile. The old nightmares were back again, sharing time with the new ones where

Jules and Julian fought for control of his mind. As frightening as the old nightmares were, he almost welcomed them for their familiarity. Almost. He yawned, stretched his limbs and then got up out of bed.

After his shower, he went to his closet. His first instinct was to grab his uniform. But then he remembered. He was off duty. Indefinitely. There was no reason to wear the uniform. He felt a slow pain in his stomach as he left it hanging there and opted for another suit. He got dressed and pinned his comm badge onto his jacket. Finished with his appearance, he headed out to the living room, which also served as a dining room. The replicator was against the right wall, just behind the table. He walked over to it, ready to order his breakfast and then abruptly stopped.

His stomach growled but he couldn't satisfy it. He stared at the device on the wall as if he hadn't ever seen it before. There were many illuminated controls of different colors and shapes on it and one large, gaping hole where he supposed food would come out. He stared at it, looking into the hole. He didn't see any food. He had a thought that he shouldn't expect to. But he was hungry and he wasn't sure what to do now.

Then the realization hit. Food was supposed to come from there, but he no longer knew how to operate it. He had lost more of his mind in the few hours he had slept. More knowledge gone. More abilities. More of Julian. He walked away from the table and moved to his desk, hoping that he still knew how to work his logs. He could ask the computer about that.

"Computer," he said, trying to get his voice to even out, "I want to record my personal log."

"Log open," the computer said cooperatively.

Julian sighed, and tried to think how to begin. His name. He should give his name. "Personal log," he said. "Julian Bashir." He thought about adding his post, but then decided against it, since Hensing now had his post. But he remembered you were supposed to say the date. "Stardate. . . ." He didn't know the stardate. Stardates were complicated. Maybe the computer would help him again. "Computer, what's the stardate?"

"The stardate is 52238.4," the computer's female voice answered.

"Stardate 52238.4," Bashir repeated. "Whatever is wrong with me has gotten worse. It appears to be progressing quickly, though we still don't know what it is. I think I do know, though. I think I said it before, but I'm not sure now. I think my enhancements are reversing themselves. I'm not sure how. I can't think like that anymore. I hope it's not really the answer.

"Maybe I'm being selfish. Maybe it's unfair. I didn't deserve the advantages I have been given. I don't deserve them now. I thought Jules Bashir was dead. But it seems he's coming back. It was his life after all. I was the one who stole it and tried to make it my own. I suppose it's some sort of justice. Fate, if one believes in such a thing. Julian Bashir will fade in place of Jules, who faded for Julian."

He bent over to put his face in his hands. "God, I hope not. There's still so much that Julian can do. I've contributed a lot, haven't I? Redeemed myself, paid for my advantages? How many people have I saved from suffering? I found a vaccine for the Blight, found antidotes for plagues and epidemics. I've tried to use what I have to help people. Given a full life, I could do more. There's a lot of potential in an enhanced mind."

He heard a sound, but was unsure what it meant. "End log," he said quickly. The noise came again. "What is that?" he asked no one in particular. He sighed when he realized it was something else he'd lost. "It would have been easier," he muttered to himself, "if I didn't know what I was losing."

* * *

><p>Jake stopped in front of Bashir's door and checked the time. 0845. He was early. Still, that wasn't likely a bad thing. Bashir tended to be a very punctual person. He touched the door chime and waited for an answer. There wasn't one. He tried again and then, when there still wasn't and an answer, he tried his comm badge. "Jake Sisko to Doctor Bashir."<p>

The answer came quickly. "Bashir here."

"I'm at the door, Doctor," Jake told him.

"Is that what that sound was?"

Jake's eyebrows raised in surprise. How could the other doctors still say that Bashir was normal? He was changing so quickly. The door opened.

"Good morning," Bashir said, but with an expression that denied his words. He gestured with his hand that Jake should come inside. "Is it time to leave?"

"Not yet," Jake answered, smiling. He wanted to put Bashir at ease somehow, if only by being a friendly face he could count on. "I'm a little early."

Bashir bit his bottom lip, and Jake thought he looked like he wanted to say something but wasn't sure if he should. Jake tried to think what it might be to save Bashir from having to ask. Thankfully, Bashir was dressed and shaved. Jake wasn't sure if he was ready for helping someone with those things. Bashir probably wouldn't be allowed to live on his own here on the station if he came to that anyway. He looked ready to go. "Have you had breakfast?" Jake asked.

"Yes," Bashir answered. "We should probably just go now."

* * *

><p>Hensing began to sense the light on the other side of his eyelids. Morning. The computer must have turned on the lights for him. He was still tired. Stayed up too late, I guess, he thought. Tired or not, he had patients. He opened his eyes, expecting to see the ceiling of the little bunk just a few feet from his face.

But that wasn't what he saw. The ceiling was several meters above him. He turned his head. Sickbay. How did he get in Sickbay? A nurse--Baines was her name--came over. She nodded to one of the other nurses and then stood beside his bed. "Good morning, Doctor. How do you feel?"

"What happened?" he asked her, starting to sit up.

"You should probably stay down, Doctor," she said putting a hand on his chest. He was wearing a hospital gown. He was a patient. He did as she said and let his head fall back again on the pillow. It felt good. He was really tired.

"What happened?" he repeated.

"We were hoping you could tell us that." Baines was checking the instrument displays above his head. Hensing turned his own head to try and get a look. It was an awkward position, but he couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. "You were unconscious when we found you in your quarters."

"Unconscious?" That didn't sound right. "I went to sleep. That's all I remember."

"Maybe you fell out of the bunk?" Baines suggested, smiling down at him.

Hensing tried to remember. "I don't remember falling."

"What do you remember?" That was a new voice, but one he recognized. It was important to recognize your commanding officer's voice. Captain Sisko had just entered Sickbay. Apparently that's what Baines had nodded to the other nurse about.

"I remember going to bed. It was midnight, I think," Hensing told him, trying to remember if he'd fallen out of his bunk. He yawned before he could catch himself. "May I ask what time it is?"

"It's 0846," Baines supplied.

"0846," Hensing repeated in wonder. How had that happened? "The computer was supposed to wake me at 0600." He yawned again. He couldn't help it. He was really tired. Maybe he had been unconscious. "But I remember being asleep," he argued with himself and with Baines. "I remember dreaming about. . . ." He hesitated, trying to catch the image from his dream before it faded. "I dreamt about a storm. Lightning." He shuddered without thinking. "It seemed so real."

* * *

><p>O'Brien decided to go by the Sickbay on Deck Two before he headed down to Engineering. The unusually long morning briefing had finally broken up when Sickbay had reported the doctor was waking up. Sisko had left with little information. It seemed the doctor had been found unconscious on the floor of his quarters during the night. Something about that hadn't sat right with O'Brien, and he hoped he might run into more details by walking past Sickbay.<p>

What he ran into was Captain Sisko, who was just leaving Sickbay.

O'Brien tried not to look embarrassed or guilty. "How's he doing?" he asked quickly, trying to cover his unease with a show of concern for the new doctor.

Sisko either didn't notice or didn't let on. "Fine as far as they can tell," Sisko shrugged. "He doesn't remember anything besides going to bed. Said he dreamt about lightning and then woke up here." He pointed his thumb at the door behind him. "He seems to be fine though, just tired. Let's try not to give him any new patients today, huh? Get the shields back up to par."

"Lightning?" O'Brien asked. Something about that struck a chord. "Oh, shields!" He realized Sisko had given him an order. Sisko had noticed after all. Sickbay was not 'on the way' to Engineering. "Of course, sir. I'll get right on it."

Sisko nodded sharply and then moved off down the corridor, heading back to the Bridge. O'Brien continued in the opposite direction to another turbolift that would take him to Engineering. He worked on the shields for the next two hours, but he had lightning on his mind. Then he remembered. Bashir had said something about lightning. No, it was electricity. He had dreamed about electricity and woke up late. Three nights in a row. The lightning dream was after they'd returned to the station.

Finishing up with the sensors, O'Brien decided to do a little investigating. The first part was easy. He called up Hensing's quarters on the computer. They were Julian's old quarters. Was it just a coincidence that two doctors using the same quarters would have the same dream? He thought about what Sisko said. Hensing was still tired. He'd been unconscious all night, but was still tired. Julian had been exhausted, like he hadn't had any sleep except for those dreams.

"I'm going to take a break," he called out to Nog who, today, did not have helm duty. He was working on the sensors. "Make sure the internal sensors are up to specs," he ordered as an afterthought. "Or better than specs. I think we may need them."

"What for, Chief?" Nog asked.

"I'm not sure yet." He waved to let Nog know that discussion was over. Then he left Engineering and returned to Sickbay.

It was nearly noon by then and Hensing was up tending his patients. Still, O'Brien saw him cover a yawn as he waited for him to finish up with a Bolian from Security. "Doctor," O'Brien said. "Can I speak with you for a moment?"

* * *

><p>"Are you sick?" Hensing asked, dispensing with any pleasantries that might have served as greeting.<p>

"No," O'Brien admitted. "It's about you."

Hensing looked slightly annoyed, but he told the nurse to continue with the patient and drew aside with O'Brien. His eyes narrowed as he appraised the Chief. "What about me?" he asked quietly.

O'Brien didn't blame him for being suspicious. He tried to think of a good way to ease into this. He wasn't even sure yet what he was hoping to find out. Then he decided to start like Julian had. "Have you ever had a dream," he asked, keeping his own voice just as quiet and hoping his face wasn't turning red, "that feels real? I mean really real."

The suspicion left Hensing's face, and worry took its place. "Are you sure you're okay, Chief?"

"I'm fine," O'Brien insisted. "Have you ever had a dream like that?"

Hensing wasn't convinced, but he played along. "Well, yes," he answered. "Everyone does at some point. It's perfectly normal. I had one just last night, actually."

"What about?" O'Brien already knew the answer, of course. He just wanted to see how Hensing would say it.

He didn't say it. "Why?" he asked in return.

"Please," O'Brien plead, "just humor me. I think I'm on to something about what happened to you last night."

That worked. "Lightning," Hensing said, looking down. "I think I was struck by it. I remember seeing electricity around me. I felt it." He looked up again. "How does that help?"

O'Brien decided to take a chance and confide in the doctor as much as he knew so far. "Your quarters used to belong to Doctor Bashir. Last time he was in them, he dreamt he was electrocuted. Said he could feel it. It was very real to him. Three nights in a row. He woke up late after each one. He was tired all day, completely exhausted. Sound familiar?"

Hensing was paying close attention now. His brows were drawn down close over his eyes. "You think there's some sort of connection between my dream and whatever's happened to Doctor Bashir."

O'Brien couldn't tell if it was a question or a statement. He just nodded. "Maybe. But I'm going to find out."

Hensing nodded, too, slowly. "Let me know what you find, Chief."

O'Brien nodded. "I'd like to start with your quarters, sir."

The doctor gave him permission to enter his quarters, so O'Brien headed there next. He felt like maybe he should tell someone, but that same nagging that had made him look into the lightning dream told him to keep this quiet for the moment. Right now, only he and Hensing knew something was up.

He did a thorough sweep of the quarters, especially the bunks. He pulled out the computer panels and scanned behind each one. He was half-expecting to find something there, maybe those parasitic things the Krajensky changeling had used. But there was nothing there. Everything seemed normal. And that just wasn't normal enough for O'Brien. Too many things had gone wrong and still tested out as

normal recently. Bashir, Hensing, and now these quarters. He was determined to find something wrong somewhere to explain all of it.

He returned to Engineering. "How are the internal sensors?" he asked Nog.

"Couldn't be better if they were just installed," he called back from somewhere down the Jefferies tube. "I think you'll be satisfied, Chief. What are you looking for?"

"I let you know as soon as I figure that out."

* * *

><p>Bashir spent three hours with Ezri before she called a break for lunch. Bashir was glad for the break, both because he was terribly hungry and because he simply didn't like talking to counselors, even one who was a friend. He had no more idea now what was wrong with him than he'd had before. Dax handed him a PADD and suggested he take it to Doctor Girani in the morning.<p>

Bashir nodded and left before Ezri could suggest an escort. One person. Jake had said to call him when he was finished with his appointment. Jake was one person. No one else needed to be concerned. He touched his comm badge. "Bashir to Jake Sisko." He stood still and waited for an answer.

Jake's reply was almost instantaneous. "Right here. Ezri's done with you?"

"Yes," Julian answered. He wanted to ask for help getting home, but it was still hard to voice such things.

"I'll be right there."

"Okay," Bashir answered, but he felt disappointed. He couldn't tell Jake why. But he was starting to draw attention just standing there. What if Dax came out and found him there?

Jake spoke again. "Start walking left out of the office. I'll meet you on the way."

Bashir felt a smile cross his face. Jake knew without him saying anything. How had he gotten so wise? He thought a moment about which way was left. But he figured it out fairly quickly. He made sure his back was to Ezri's door and turned left, walking slowly so that he wouldn't come to a cross corridor before Jake arrived.

Jake caught up with him within five minutes, and they walked the rest of the way to Bashir's quarters. He carried a box in his hands but he didn't offer to tell what it was. Instead, Jake told Bashir about a new story he was starting.

When they reached Bashir's quarters, Jake invited himself in. Bashir didn't say anything. He was curious about the box. He could smell something inside it.

Jake set the box on the table. "What did Ezri say?" he asked.

Bashir thought for a moment and then remembered the PADD he had in his hand. "More than I understood." He hesitated before handing the PADD to Jake. "This is private," he felt he had to add.

"Of course," Jake said. "If she wrote in counselor mumbo jumbo, I won't understand it either." Still he read over the PADD. His brows furrowed as Julian watched, but he didn't say anything as he read. Finally, he frowned. "It doesn't say much, really. She couldn't find any psychological cause for what's happening. She thinks you're suffering from a lot of stress and that you keep things in too much. Anything beyond that is beyond me."

"But it doesn't help," Bashir concluded. "Not now."

"No," Jake agreed. "Shall I call Doctor Girani and make another appointment?"

Julian went to the couch and fell onto it, forgetting about the box. "Yes, please."

Jake went to the computer, and Bashir just stared at the ceiling. But then he smelled that smell again. "I thought I'd make some lunch," Jake said. "I figured you had enough to worry about."

* * *

><p>The mess hall was crowded, but the crew had left one table for the captain to sit alone. Usually someone on the senior staff would join him, but there was no one available this trip. Worf had the bridge, and O'Brien was busy in engineering. Doctor Hensing had still been busy in Sickbay. It was a shame. Sisko thought they needed to get to know each other. As things stood now, it looked as if Bashir wouldn't be coming back. He'd gotten a call from the station. Both Doctor Girani and Dax had been unable to find a cause for his recent whatever-it-was. Sisko didn't even know what to call it, but it didn't seem to be getting any better. In fact, Dax had reported that things were getting worse.<p>

The chatter in the room was loud. Some were laughing, telling stories. Others were talking in low voices, their heads bowed. Must be the war, Sisko decided. He took a drink of his raktojin and wished there was someone across the table. He could stand some conversation. Well, it was only one night more. Tomorrow night, he'd be back on the station and he'd have Kasidy for a dinner companion.

O'Brien and Nog entered the mess hall together and Sisko waved them over. "Have a seat, gentlemen."

O'Brien stopped by the table but didn't sit down. He looked around the room with apprehension. He leaned down. "Actually, sir, we were hoping to speak to you privately."

Sisko didn't like that tone of voice. But he trusted it. He placed his napkin back on the table and rose from his seat. "My quarters are close by."

The three of them left the mess hall and its noise behind. Once inside Sisko's quarters, Nog began to scan the room with a tricorder. Sisko waited for an explanation, but neither of the engineers spoke.

"Chief?" he asked.

"Just a minute, sir," O'Brien held him off. "Nog?"

"All clear," Nog reported. "I'll set up a dampening field." He began working on the control console set into the wall.

"Just making sure no one's listening in, Captain," O'Brien explained.

Sisko tried to be patient, but he didn't like this situation. What if O'Brien was a changeling? No, Nog would have to be one, too, or there would still be a witness. He waited.

Finally Nog nodded that the field was up and O'Brien began to talk. "We have a saboteur on board."

That certainly did explain the secrecy. Sisko crossed his arms and leaned against the bunks. "How do you know."

"A hunch," O'Brien answered. But then he added. "Something you said this morning."

A hunch was a little less dramatic than Sisko had hoped. If one is going to get worked up about a saboteur, one wants something a little more solid to go on. "What was it that I said that gave you a hunch?"

"You told me about Doctor Hensing."

"You think Hensing is a saboteur?"

O'Brien looked hurt. "No, sir. I think he's a victim of the saboteur. If you'll hear me out, Captain."

"Sorry, Chief," Sisko said. Maybe he was just hungry and it was making him more impatient than usual. "Please continue."

"You said Hensing was tired after he was unconscious all night," O'Brien continued. "And you said he dreamt about lightning. Do you remember some weeks ago, when Julian was so exhausted he nearly fell asleep in the morning briefing?"

What did this have to do with Bashir? Sisko wondered. Bashir had been officially relieved of duty. And he hadn't been on the Defiant for the better part of a month. But, yes, Sisko did remember. Bashir wasn't one to fall asleep on duty. He nodded.

"He woke up late three days in a row," the Chief said. "Each time, he said he remembered dreaming about being electrocuted. Said it seemed very real to him. He hasn't been on the Defiant since. And no one had used his quarters since then either. Except Hensing. And his first night in there he dreams about getting hit by lightning."

Sisko was getting it, but not how it led to sabotage. "You think Bashir might have been unconscious, too. Only no one found him. He just woke up in the morning."

O'Brien nodded. "I checked out the quarters and didn't find anything."

Then I really thought about the dreams. Maybe they weren't dreams at all. Maybe they really were hit by something."

Now Nog joined in. "We've spent the last seven hours going through energy readings from the last five weeks. But we found it." He held up a PADD. Sisko took it and scrolled through the data there. He didn't see anything out of the ordinary.

"Don't see anything?" O'Brien asked. "Neither did we. At first. But it's there. Or more accurately, it's not there." He came to Sisko's side and pointed to a line of data. "These are the readings for all systems the day before Julian's first electricity dream." He pointed to three other lines. "And these are the readings for the next three nights."

Sisko studied the data hoping to see what O'Brien saw. But he just couldn't see it. The readings for the first day and the next three were only slightly different. Less than one percent lower for each system. "One percent."

O'Brien nodded, and smiled with a hint of admiration. "Less than one percent, and that's across the board. You add all that up and you get a fair amount of energy. And look here." He pressed a control on the PADD and a new set of figures appeared. "These are the readings for the light fixture above the top bunk in Julian's quarters."

There were two figures for each set. One was energy coming into the fixture, and the other was energy expended by the fixture. Normal scans would only show output. It must have been some hunch for the Chief to go to all this work. The output was normal and steady for the entire range of days. The energy input however was much higher for the four days O'Brien highlighted. Sisko turned off the PADD and turned to face O'Brien in full. "Tear his quarters apart if you have to. Ensign!"

Nog drew himself to attention beside O'Brien. Sisko looked down at him. "Take the helm. Set course for Starbase 137, under my authorization. Don't explain and don't tell anyone about this. Except for you, everyone goes about their duties as usual until we reach the starbase. We are the only ones who know about this?" He waited for confirmation nods. Still, he wanted to hear it. "Understood?"

Nog was practically beaming. "Understood."

"Yes, sir," O'Brien acknowledged.

6. Part Six

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Six****

Jake stopped by in the morning again, giving plenty of time for the

trip to the Infirmary. He had a hunch and decided to go with it. "Have you had breakfast?" he asked Bashir when the doctor opened the door.

Bashir didn't answer right away. He just sighed and looked away toward the replicator. "It's easy, isn't it?" he said.

"The replicator?" Jake decided not to answer in the affirmative. Bashir had apparently become unable to use the thing. Best not make him feel worse about it. "I can fix you something," he offered. "We have time."

Bashir slumped into one of the chairs at the table. "Jake," was all he managed to say.

Jake's smile faded. He didn't know what to say. "What's it like?" he asked quietly and then regretted it.

He hadn't really expected an answer, but Bashir's words came out in a rush. "I woke up this morning and I couldn't do things that I could do yesterday. And I know it. What do you think it would be like," he said, not sounding angry, "to wake up and find you couldn't read? You write stories. What if you couldn't spell the words anymore?"

Jake tried humor, smiling as he sat down. "My dad swears I can't spell now." To his surprise, it worked. Bashir actually smiled and chuckled just a little. Jake decided he needed a sincere answer though. "I think I'd be depressed," he said.

Bashir nodded. "I'm hungry, but I don't want to eat. So, no, you don't have to fix me anything. Let's just go."

"Okay." Jake stood up. "I have an idea," he said, a little unsure of whether it was a good idea or not. "I could stay here."

Bashir looked at him suspiciously. "Why?"

Well, he'd already jumped in, so why not with both feet? "You don't want to ask for help," he said, looking Bashir right in the eye. "If I stay here, you won't have to. I'll be here and you won't have to ask anyone else. I can make sure you get where you need to go. I can make sure you have something to eat. I can even cook it. We Sisko's are good at that, you know."

Bashir appeared to be considering it. The suspicion was gone. "I don't know, Jake, you're--"

"Messy," Jake finished for him. "I won't be. I promise. It'll only be temporary anyway. Then you'll be fine and I'll go back to my own quarters. I could sleep on the couch."

"You're too big for the couch," Bashir argued half-heartedly.

"Okay, then a cot. We'll stick it in a corner. I'll bring some PADDs for my writing. Just one little corner." Jake held his hands out in front of him, almost pleading. To tell the truth, he wasn't sure why. Maybe he subconsciously still felt guilty about Ajilon Prime. He'd run off after Bashir went down in an artillery attack. He'd left him. Maybe he felt he needed to make up for it. Maybe.

Bashir bit his lip again, thinking. "What's for lunch?" he asked.

Jake smiled. "I'll surprise you," he said.

Bashir wasn't smiling. "Good. I'd probably just forget anyway."

* * *

><p>Colonel Kira rolled the baseball over in her hands. She was relieved to have it back again. It had been back for awhile, but it was a relief just the same. It meant Sisko--the Emissary--was coming back. She hadn't been so relieved a couple months ago. It was good to have him back, though she couldn't help but feel there was a difference now. Jadzia was gone, Sisko was different, and Bashir was. . . . She didn't know.<p>

She felt helpless though. She didn't know what was wrong or what to say. So she hadn't said anything, and, because of that, she felt guilty.

A call came and she put the ball aside. It was the First Minister. "This is Kira," she answered, "put him through."

* * *

><p>Jake had insisted on lunch before the inspection of his quarters. Julian still wasn't sure about the new arrangements. But it appeared Jake's writing was beginning to give him more insight into people. He'd pegged Julian right on that morning. He didn't want to ask for help in things that were supposed to be easy. Things like working the replicator. But Jake had made a point as well. He'd already asked Jake for help. He could limit his dependency to one person. One willing person, from the looks of it. And the food was delicious. "Are you going to cook every meal like this?" he asked, smiling slightly. Slight smiles were all he could manage anymore.<p>

"Well," Jake said, "maybe not every meal." He stood up and started to clean off the table. "See, not messy." He grinned.

Bashir let out a chuckle at that. "I can help," he said. He was a little confused--which he hated--but he just watched what Jake did and followed suit. He was almost surprised when the dishes disappeared in the replicator after Jake touched one of the controls. He tried not to show it though. He was sure he knew about that yesterday.

It was a big lunch and it took a few minutes to clear everything away. "What were you trying to read the other day?" Jake asked as he put the last of the dishes away.

"A report," Bashir answered. "But before that it was that book over by Kukalaka."

Jake walked over to look. He smiled when he saw it. "A Tale of Two Cities," he read. "Good choice. I could read it to you."

Bashir thought about that. "I doubt I could make heads or tails of most of it." He picked the book up and held it in his hands. "Well, maybe the last two pages."

"Deal," Jake said enthusiastically.

"You're stalling," Bashir said, and Jake looked like he was caught off guard. "Where's the cot?"

Jake made a play of looking guilty. He stared at his feet and gestured into the next room. "Bedroom." Bashir took a deep breath and then headed inside. Jake was just behind him and they stopped just inside the door. "Just one corner, like we agreed. You won't even notice I'm there."

Julian surveyed the damage. There really wasn't any. The cot did take up one corner near his closet, but that was all. There was a small shelf under the cot, with clothes and PADDs on it. Jake was going to keep himself compact, it seemed. And Bashir did need him.

"Alright," Bashir said. "But the first time I find clothes on the floor. . . ." He let it trail off. He wasn't sure what kind of threat he could make. Jake was doing this as a favor, not as an obligation.

"You won't," he promised, still smiling. They went back into the living room and Jake picked up the book.

* * *

><p>Kira was at dinner when the call came. The Defiant wouldn't be returning as expected. They were docked at Starbase 137 until further notice. There was a problem with security was all Admiral Ross would say. Kira had asked to speak to Sisko, but she'd been denied. She couldn't speak to anyone in the crew either. She didn't like it, but she hadn't had any reason yet not to trust Admiral Ross. He assured her that it was only a temporary delay and that Sisko would call as soon as he was free to do so.

Strangely, he'd also asked for an update on Bashir's condition. She wasn't sure why he'd ask, but he made her go through the strictest security precautions before sending Girani's latest information.

* * *

><p>Their first night as roommates had gone smoothly enough. That is, until around two in the morning. That's when Jake discovered that Doctor Bashir had nightmares. He wasn't sure exactly what it was that woke him up. Bashir hadn't said anything in his sleep. He'd made no sound at all. And besides twitching slightly, he hadn't moved from his original sleeping position, which was odd in itself. He slept on his right side with one arm tucked near his head and on top of the other arm, almost as if he were cradling it. But the twitching had become more erratic and more violent, which is what caused Jake to try and wake him.<p>

He rolled himself off his cot--which was more uncomfortable than he had supposed, but not so bad that he'd complain--and walked over to Bashir's side. He reached a hand out to gently touch Bashir's arm, planning to rock him slightly. At the same time, he whispered, "Doctor?"

Bashir's eyes snapped open instantly. He bolted upright in the bed,

but not until one strong hand clamped down hard on Jake's wrist. It startled Jake enough that he jumped back himself, but Bashir's grip was strong enough that Jake couldn't pull himself free. His feet slipped out from under him instead and he fell to the floor.

Bashir, luckily, came to full awareness rather quickly, and released Jake's wrist. "Jake," he said, with a tone that implied surprise, anger, and relief all at the same time. He slumped back down on the bed. He was breathing heavy.

"Good reflexes," Jake muttered, sitting up. He rubbed at his wrist and started to feel the blood rushing back into his fingers. "You were having a nightmare."

Bashir sighed and threw himself back down on the pillow. "Is that all?" he asked. "I've learned to sleep through nightmares. If I didn't, I'd never get any sleep."

Jake stood, feeling the crisis was now over. "You mean you have nightmares all the time?"

Bashir nodded. "Don't worry about it," he said, still sounding a bit angry. "And don't wake me up like that anymore."

"Okay," Jake agreed, choosing not to pursue it. He padded back to his cot and sat down. "What do you dream about?" he asked anyway, giving in to his curiosity.

"I remember things," Bashir answered. "Let's leave it at that for now, shall we?" He was more brusque that time.

Jake took it as a sign he really didn't want to talk about it. This time, he wisely kept his mouth shut. "Okay," he said again. "See you in the morning." He shut his eyes and prepared to fall back asleep.

* * *

><p>The Defiant had been locked down as soon as she docked at Starbase 137. Sisko had requested only that DS Nine be informed of the delay in her return. His request was granted, and Admiral Ross had relayed the message. After that, each of the crewmembers were escorted by the starbase's security officers to individual, sound-proof holding cells or stripped crew quarters. They were given no explanation, no time to gather their things. Many of them complained. Only Sisko, O'Brien, and Nog went quietly. By Sisko's orders, Security Chief Vndara questioned each of the forty-one crewmembers individually. Starfleet officers from the starbase kept a constant watch over the _Defiant_'s crew, relieving each other every three hours. One at a time, the crew, starting with Captain Sisko and the senior staff, were brought to the Infirmary and subjected to three hours worth of tests designed to prove--or disprove-- their species.

At the same time, the ship was undergoing a thorough search by starbase Security and Engineering teams. Every chip, every relay, every wire and console was stripped out and searched by the engineers, with phaser-wielding Security standing ready. Sisko watched the ship from the window in his new quarters. It was really the only place worthy of staring and he was glad that it looked out

on his ship. The room itself was bare. It contained only a bed. Every other amenity had been taken out to deny any opportunity for sabotage or escape to the infiltrator who had tampered with Bashir's--Hensing's--light fixture.

He threw that last fraction of a thought away. It was Bashir's quarters when the light fixture was altered. Hensing had only been an accidental victim. For Bashir, it had been deliberate. But why? What was Bashir to the outside world? To Sisko, to the station's crew, he was something--he was starting to realize that now. He was their heart, their conscience. He was the voice of compassion, a reminder of what was right. But to everyone else? Bashir was arrogant, surely. They didn't know him. He was intelligent, yes. Because of his enhancements, of course--ill-gotten intelligence, unfair advantage perhaps. He was a doctor. A lonely doctor at the far reaches of Federation territory, a doctor who volunteered for a post no one else wanted. Most of them probably didn't even know his name. So what made him so special to someone to sabotage his quarters?

The door chime sounded. Sisko straightened up and faced the door at attention. Two Security guards entered, one carrying a tray of food. There were no utensils. It was all finger food. Sisko nodded, satisfied. He knew he wasn't the saboteur, but he knew if he was getting such stark--and yet not unfair or cruel--treatment, then his crew was too. And perhaps the saboteur was among them. If he was, then he'd be found.

* * *

><p>Dinner was over and Jake was putting the dishes away. Julian Bashir watched him for a few minutes trying to remember how the replicator made the dishes disappear. He could only remember that they did disappear though. How they did was unexplainable. He turned away and leaned forward against the back of the sofa. The big Cardassian windows framed hundreds of tiny shining stars. A ship flew by, maneuvering to dock. Klingon, Bashir remembered, and he wondered if it was Martok's ship. Where had it come from? Which one of those stars had it visited?<p>

The stars were very far away. He knew that. He remembered his teacher telling him that. His first teacher just before he went away. Mr. Descher. He was always trying to find ways to help Julian understand things. And he never got angry when he didn't or couldn't. He just tried again. Julian smiled at the memory and at the stars so far away. What was it that Descher had said? The light he was seeing had stopped shining long before. Something like that.

"What?" Jake asked. Julian hadn't even realized he was sitting on the sofa, too. He was looking out the window, turning his head to try and see what had made Bashir smile.

Julian watched him, but Jake didn't find it. He couldn't. He knew too much. He understood too much. For the first time since he felt his mind slipping away, Julian felt glad for it, for just this one thing. His smile broadened just a bit. "The stars."

Jake turned back to the window and stared hard. "What about them?"

"They're far away," Julian told him, knowing that Jake wouldn't quite

understand.

"Yes, they are," Jake replied.

"Do you remember when you were little?" Julian began, wanting Jake to understand now, like he did. "When you looked out at the stars?"

"I remember my mom telling me that's where my dad was."

"Did you try to see him?"

Jake smiled, too, remembering. "Yeah, but the stars were too far away."

"The light was old," Julian told him.

It took Jake a minute to translate that. "Um, yeah, the light from the stars was old light."

"It's magic," Julian said, letting go of his smile. "I remember being in school and learning about the stars, about light traveling. It took the magic away. That's why you couldn't see it. I don't understand it anymore. I can see the magic again."

* * *

><p>One the second day, a baryon beam swept the Defiant from stem to stern. Any changeling who might be able to hold its shape for more than forty-eight hours would not have been able to withstand the baryon sweep. Sisko knew it was happening, but all he could see from his window was the blackness of space. The ship had had to be moved for such a sweep. There were no facilities for such at her previous docking port.

The stars called to him. Like friends, old friends. He'd seen them so many times, from his bedroom window as a child, from the stoop outside the restaurant, from his porch on the house he'd shared with Jennifer, from his first shuttle ride to the moon, from his first tour of duty on his first training ship, from the first time he looked out the large, oval windows on Deep Space Nine. Those windows held more than the others. They held the wormhole, too, and the Prophets within it. They held his destiny, full of joys and dangers, sadness and glory. All of it.

This window only held distance. The stars were too small, too far away. They didn't twinkle with life the way the others did. This wasn't home.

He sat down on the bed, and then laid down. It had been several hours since his last meal and his last news of the universe beyond his stark quarters. He tried to force his mind into thinking about something. So many times, he'd wished for more time, time to think things through, to ponder the big problems, to work out the little ones. But there had never been enough. Now, in a room by himself with no distractions besides the empty window, he had all the time in the world. And nothing to occupy his mind.

* * *

><p>Bashir didn't sleep. The light was off, the bed was comfortable,

and Jake was already sleeping. But Bashir couldn't. Thoughts ran through his mind, most of them unbidden. They were memories more than thoughts, images more than anything else. Snapshots of his life. His childhood, the hospital on Adigeon Prime, the girl dying on Invernia II while lightning flashed outside, his first day at the Academy, his graduation from Starfleet Medical, every life he'd saved, every patient he'd lost, his first look at Deep Space Nine, his first time seeing the wormhole from the inside, the first time he saw the *Defiant*, the last time he'd worn his uniform. It was only days ago, but it felt like he'd lost his own skin.

It was hanging in his closet. It was there every day for him to see as he picked out something else. Each day he understood less all the responsibilities behind it, and each day he missed it more.

The ceiling was interesting. He'd not paid much attention to it before, but now he did. It wasn't flat like his ceiling at home when he was a boy, in his room in the Academy, or in his quarters on the Defiant. This one had shapes, curves, and corners--more corners than the others. The color was different, too, even though it was dark. The other ceilings were always white. This one was dark and gray. It was like that in the Infirmary, too.

* * *

><p>On the third day, Security and Engineering teams repeated their search and the *Defiant* was declared clean. Also on the third day, the crew was declared clean. There had not been a changeling onboard. But that still left a saboteur. Sisko ordered more questioning. It was Hensing who suggested more tests. A full DNA test, he told Vndara, had not been performed. Vndara had asked him if he knew the reasons for the tests. He said he didn't, but suspected there was foul play involved because of the incident with his quarters. Pressed for details of the incident, he was unable to give them. He'd been unconscious that night and didn't remember anything beyond the lightning dream, which had not recurred once aboard the starbase.

All this was reported back to Sisko, who sat patiently in his holding cell. He agreed to the DNA tests and volunteered to be first. Once the last of the crew was tested, he was again removed from his cell and taken to the Infirmary. Doctor Barton greeted him warmly. "You're Joe Sisko's son, aren't you?" He held out his hand.

Sisko sensed progress in the investigation. Barton had been cold before, professional but unfeeling, not opening up and allowing no conversation. Just as Sisko had ordered. "Yes," he answered, taking the man's hand. "You know him?"

"Love the restaurant," Barton told him, leading Sisko to his office. The security guards stayed outside. "No one makes jambalaya like Joe. That is, of course, unless he passed the recipe on to you."

Sisko laughed and took the seat that Barton indicated. "That he did."

"Well, maybe you'd oblige a few of us with a meal before you head back to DS Nine." Barton handed a PADD across his desk to Sisko. "I think we've found your little problem."

Sisko looked at the PADD. It contained results from the DNA test of Lieutenant Jordan, a helm officer. "The first set of patterns is from his records upon admission to Starfleet Academy," Barton explained. "We thought it best to compare back as far as possible. The second set is from the test we ran here."

Sisko studied the two sets of patterns, reconfiguring the PADD to show them side by side. The patterns seemed to match perfectly. "I don't see anything," Sisko stated, placing the PADD back on the desk. "And to be honest, my Chief of Operations did the same thing to me when he discovered the sabotage. I'd prefer you just tell me what you see in the results."

Barton smiled and nodded. "Some people like the satisfaction of solving it for themselves," he said. "Didn't want to deprive you of the opportunity. Look at line 4G. The patterns are not quite the same. They're very close. Very close. But there's a slight genetic drift."

"A clone?" Sisko asked, picking up the PADD again. Bashir had said once that all clones showed a genetic drift. "Jordan is a clone? Since when?"

"I've requested all his DNA scan results from Starfleet Medical and DS Nine." Barton pressed a few controls on his desk and swivelled a monitor around so that Sisko could see. "He was the original thing when tested for typhus. That was the closest we could pinpoint it."

"That was months ago," Sisko said, sitting back. His stomach was beginning to hurt. Jordan was a good officer. He had put himself on the line and at considerable risk during that particular mission. Sisko had made sure he got a commendation for it. "Makes me wonder where the real Jordan is."

Barton leaned forward against his desk. His smile was gone. "There's a war on. I think we can assume he's been killed."

Sisko noted a shadow falling over the top of the desk. "He's your officer." Sisko turned to see who had spoken. "Sort of. I'm willing to turn the investigation over to you at this point," Vndara continued. "He'll have to remain here, in custody, but you're welcome to question him."

Sisko rubbed his hands over his eyes, feeling suddenly quite fatigued. He'd lost two good officers now in the span of only a few weeks. Three, if he counted back farther. And he hadn't lost them in battle. "Did you manage to get anything out of him?" he asked.

"He claims to know nothing of the sabotage," Vndara reported. "He isn't aware that we're on to him."

Sisko nodded and stood. Barton stood with him, and Sisko offered his hand. "Thank you for all your help." He turned back to Vndara. "I take it the rest of the crew can be released back to the _Defiant_."

"Of course," the Security officer replied. "I'll order it immediately."

* * *

><p>Julian watched Jake go and wished that he had stayed. Garak was watching him from across the table. He could feel it. And he didn't think it felt good. He had hardly left his quarters the last few days, except to go to the Infirmary or to talk to Ezri Dax. Garak was different altogether. Julian could deal with the other two as a patient. Garak was his friend.<p>

Garak smiled. "I'm glad you came, Doctor."

Julian shook his head. He realized he was biting his lip and stopped. "You shouldn't call me that."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not a doctor anymore," Julian answered. He felt it was obvious. But then, Jake hadn't stopped calling him by that title either.

"Yes you are," Garak corrected. "Just merely not a practicing one." He nodded his head toward Bashir's plate and utensils, neither of which had been touched. "Are you going to eat?"

"I--I'm not really hungry," Julian stammered.

"Are you intimidated by me, Doctor?" Garak was still smiling, but Julian wasn't sure if was teasing or being sincere.

"I can't talk to you," Bashir admitted. "Not like before."

"That's alright," Garak reassured him. "We don't have to. We're just two friends having lunch. We don't have to debate anything."

"Debate?" Julian couldn't place the word. It sounded intimidating.

"Friendly arguing," Garak explained patiently. "We don't have to do that. We can talk about other things."

"Like what?" Julian asked. Garak was being so nice about it, he was starting to feel less nervous.

"Like how you are doing," Garak replied. "You've been to the Infirmary a lot. I hope that means progress. Has Doctor Girani been able to help you?"

Julian frowned and looked down at this food. "Does it look like I've been helped?" he shot back. Then he sighed. "I'm sorry. It's not your fault. It's not her fault either. I just don't want to be like this. I remember our lunches, Garak. I remember de--arguing with you. I miss that. But I can't do it now. You're too clever and I'm not smart enough. You should have lunch with someone else."

"I don't have lunch with you just to debate," Garak told him, reaching across the table to touch his hand. Bashir tried to pull his back, but Garak had a stronger grip. "I have lunch with you because you're my friend," he continued. "My only true friend. And I will return that friendship even if we sit here and never say a word."

* * *

><p>"Put him through on a secured channel," Kira said. She turned the viewer on the desk around so that it faced her and switched it on. The blackness there was immediately replaced by Captain Sisko's face. From Sisko's expression, she didn't expect good news. "Good to see you, Captain," she offered, keeping her side of the conversation neutral for now. She had her own bad news to deliver.<p>

"You, too, Colonel," Sisko replied. "I hope things are going well on the station."

"As well as can be expected," she replied, nodding. "There's been no new activity around here since before you left. The rest of the convoy escorts arrived back yesterday without incident."

"Glad to hear it," Sisko said, though he didn't look particularly glad. "We have a problem, Colonel."

Yes, we do, she thought. _Yours first._ She waited for him to continue. "This is a secured channel?" he asked. She nodded. "Fine. It appears the Dominion has found a new way to infiltrate our crew." Kira sat up straighter, not having expected the news to be _that_ bad. Sisko dipped his head in a slight nod, acknowledging her surprise. "You should have Doctor Girani run DNA scans on the entire crew at her convenience. They're using clones."

"Clones?" Kira repeated. As far as she knew, they were already using clones. Vorta were cloned and Jem'Hadar were genetically engineered. But as yet, neither species had tried to infiltrate the Federation. Only changelings had done that.

Sisko seemed to know what she was thinking. "Human clones. I can't say much more for security reasons. I'll fill you in when I return. For now, just keep a tight lid on everything."

Kira nodded, unsure if she should even bother the captain with her news. It only involved one man anyway, even if he was someone they cared about.

"How is Julian?" Sisko asked, apparently putting aside the security problems.

"Doctor Girani has been running tests every day," she told him. "It's not encouraging. Julian's IQ is dropping by at least ten points every day. Jake has offered to stay with him."

"Has the doctor found anything physically wrong with him?"

Kira shook her head. "No, can't find a thing. We don't have any explanation for it."

"I may," he said. "I'll fill you in when I get back. Sisko out."

Kira watched the screen change to the Federation's symbol and then switched it off. She wondered what it was that Sisko wasn't telling her just yet. She understood about security, but it wasn't helping Julian any to keep it a secret.

* * *

><p>"I'll be okay," Julian told him. A girl was waiting outside the door. Jake hadn't let her in. Julian was thankful for that. Not many people got through his door anymore. He didn't want them to come. Girani had sent him home that afternoon. No more tests. There were no more tests.<p>

"I'll be back before dinner," Jake told him. "I promise. You can call me if you get hungry."

"Go." Julian sat down on the couch and pretended to be comfortable. He even smiled. "Just go."

Jake didn't look completely convinced. "Okay." He smiled, too, and opened the door. The girl,--he recognized her though he couldn't place her name--still outside, waved and nodded a smile to Julian before she and Jake disappeared.

Julian waited for the door to close and then sighed. He was alone. It felt good. It wasn't that he didn't like Jake or didn't appreciate him. Without Jake, he probably would have starved. But. But what? He didn't really know. Maybe O'Brien was more right than he thought. Julian was used to keeping things to himself. He didn't share his misfortunes and fears with others. He kept them locked inside. Not the smartest thing to do. But it was one of his oldest habits. Older than the enhancements. Keep quiet. You can't be wrong if you don't say anything. If no one was around, there was no one to say anything to. It was easy logic, something he'd understood as a child and something he could still understand.

But now what? He'd finished recording logs yesterday like he'd finished with taking tests today. There was nothing else to say. Nothing he could work out anyway. He felt like he'd missed so much. So much was lost and would stay lost now. Like the Blight. He was the only one working on a cure. Who would work on it now? Who would even think to read his notes and continue his work? Who would even think of it? Who would know about Trevean and Ekorla and all the others who died or were dying of the Blight every day?

No one. No one would remember them. No one would think of them. No one could get to them anyway. He wasn't sure why though. Not anymore. He remembered knowing before, like a shadow in his mind. But his mind was full of such shadows. They got in the way of the answers he wanted. But not of the memories. Those he still had. So he remembered Ekorla. He remembered the faith she had in him. He remembered her smile, her hair, her simple assurance. She trusted him. Her trust was misplaced. He had saved her son and the other new babies, but all the others would die. He had let them down.

The girl had come by to invite Jake to play dom-jot. Sometimes Jake played it by himself on one of the PADDs he always seemed to be carrying. He found one of them sitting on the coffee table. It was either a story, in which case he wouldn't be able to read it, or it was the game. He picked it up, and pressed one of its controls. It lit up obediently and there were no letters. But the game was no more accessible. He remembered playing it, but he didn't understand the rules.

He set the PADD back on the table and leaned back in the couch. "Computer," he said, hoping that was enough to make it listen. "Play some Mozart, please."

"Specify piece," the computer intoned.

"Specify?" he asked, feeling the word to be unfamiliar and complicated. "Piece of what?"

"Unable to comply."

Bashir folded over and rested his head in his hands. Unable to comply. What did that mean? There was no music playing. So he reasoned it meant the computer wouldn't play Mozart. He rubbed his face, and tried to convince himself that this wasn't so bad. There were worse things. He had bad memories, too. There was a time when he had wanted to be unable to think, when he had wanted to be mindless, when he would have preferred it to the conscious awareness of the horrors and pain all around him. But it didn't help. His mind may have been going away, but his memories remained. He kept none of the advantages.

7. Part Seven

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Seven****

Sisko faced him. Lieutenant Jordan. He stood stiffly, at attention. But as soon as Vndara and the others left the two of them alone, his shoulders dropped and his gray eyes locked with Sisko's. "Captain," he pleaded. "Please tell me what's going on."

Sisko didn't let his shoulders drop, and he didn't let it show that Jordan's words--spoken in Jordan's voice--had pulled at him. _This is not Jordan,_ he told himself. "When were you created?" he asked, keeping his voice flat, formal.

Jordan's eyebrows dropped as soon as the last word was out. He took a step closer to the force-field that held him back. "What?!"

Sisko repeated the question. "When were you created?"

"Created?" Jordan played the part well: a man faced with the absurd. "I was _born_ twenty-nine years ago."

Sisko's head shook. It was very slight, and once he noticed it, he stopped immediately. He sighed. There was really no way to continue without letting the clone know. "Lieutenant Jordan was born twenty-nine years ago. You were not. We know who you are."

He took another step. Another inch and the force-field would shimmer. Another inch and he'd be thrown back a meter or more. "I don't know

what you're talking about," he said, speaking slowly. "I _am_ Lieutenant Jordan." His hands shook. His face flushed red. "What is going on?" he yelled.

"Your DNA test showed a characteristic genetic drift," Sisko explained. "You are a clone of Lieutenant Jordan. You are not him."

"Captain, please." Jordan almost put his hands out, but pulled them back just before they hit the field. "I don't know why the test would say that. I'm me. I know I'm me. Ask me anything. I'll prove it."

Sisko shook his head again. "I'm sure they could engineer that."

"They who?" Jordan asked, pleading again. "The Dominion? It has to be the Dominion or you wouldn't keep me locked up in here." He looked up at the ceiling and turned away, scanning the three walls that held him and the empty space that held the force-field. He sunk down onto the bench that served as a bed in the small cell. His hands covered his face. His breathing was audible and not rhythmic.

"You're a clone," Sisko repeated, feeling cold inside. Jordan's shoulders were shaking.

"But I remember my parents," he said without turning. "Margaret and Joe Jordan. They live in Topeka. I was born there. Our house was only a few kilometers from the Keeper of the Plains. Mom is an architect. Dad's a sculptor. They have a dog named Nalami that they got off Katemma Prime. It was a stray."

He believed, Sisko realized. The Dominion had given him Jordan's memories. He didn't think it beyond their capabilities. The changeling that had replaced Bashir for over a month had inherited Bashir's medical skills and memories. "Those aren't your memories," Sisko told him. "Things will go easier for you if you just accept that and tell us what we need to know."

Jordan didn't hear. "I joined Starfleet to be a pilot. The _Defiant_ was my third post. My first was on the _Repulse._"

"Those aren't your memories," Sisko repeated, raising his voice just a little higher. "We know you're a clone, and we know you sabotaged Doctor Bashir's quarters on the _Defiant_."

Jordan stopped babbling and turned to look at Sisko. "Doctor Bashir? Sabotage? Why would I do that?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Sisko told him.

Jordan stood again, again coming too close to the force-field. "I risked my life for him. I worked all day with a broken arm to find him. Why would I sabotage his quarters?"

Sisko took a deep breath and started the sentence again. "Those are not your--"

"Memories," Jordan finished for him. "Yeah, I remember the refrain." He shook his head and retreated back to the bed. "I didn't do what

you say I did. If I'm a clone, where is the real me?"

"I asked you first."

"I don't know!" Jordan placed his elbows on his knees and let his head fall into his hands. "I don't know. Can't you get that? I don't remember anything but the memories that you say aren't mine."

Sisko stepped out of attention, taking a step toward the cell. "Either you're lying," he said, "in which case, you'll be handed over to Starfleet Intelligence and moved to a Federation prison for the duration of the war, or you really believe that, in which case you'll spend the war in a Federation mental facility. The end result is largely the same either way. The war, for you, is over. You'll never see Joe and Margaret Jordan again or the Keeper of the Plains. And they'll never know what happened to their son."

Jordan rubbed his eyes and then leaned back against the wall. His eyes searched the ceiling for a better alternative. "I'm not lying," he said softly. "Tell them that."

"You're not their son."

"How could this happen?"

"Jordan has been running maneuvers in the runabouts," Sisko suggested. "It's possible he was abducted then."

Jordan shook his head. "I was never alone then. There was always a co-pilot."

"Earth."

"When?" Jordan turned his head. "I haven't been there since I broke that arm."

"But Jordan stayed behind with the Defiant. He was, in effect, on leave, for several days."

Jordan appeared to study his shoes. He nodded in short, subtle movements. "It's possible. I don't remember. Why not a changeling?"

Sisko pulled a chair out and sat down himself. "Maybe they felt it too risky with all the blood screenings."

The nod became more pronounced, more confident. "A clone would come out human. But I don't--didn't--know I was a clone. How can I be any good to them?"

"You don't remember sabotaging the ship?" Sisko let himself feel that Jordan was being honest. Perhaps it was a dangerous step, but he put his faith in the force-field between them. When Jordan shook his head, he said, "You could have compartmentalized it." That's what Bashir had said Sloan and Section 31 had tried to convince him of.

"Compartmentalized?" Jordan got up and moved to the front of the cell again where he sat on the floor. "What's that?"

"You can compartmentalize your thoughts, your memories, so that you don't even know what you've done," Sisko explained, knowing he was oversimplifying it. Now was not the time for a detailed analysis of the ability. "Maybe we can help you remember."

Jordan stood and backed away. His wide eyes locked onto Sisko's. "Help me how? You won't let them hurt me?"

Sisko stood. "The Federation does not torture its prisoners," he stated, hoping he was telling the truth. The fact that there was a Section 31--and had been for a very long time--gave him reason to doubt. "I was thinking more along the lines of hypnosis."

Jordan let out a long breath and moved forward cautiously. "Supposing it worked," he posed, "and I did remember being a clone. After you get what you want, what happens to me?"

"I'll do my best to see you're treated well," Sisko told him honestly. "You won't be able to go free, of course. You're a security risk."

Jordan's focus seemed to waver for a moment. He bit his lips and rubbed his hands together. "No," he said, finally, refocussing on Sisko.

"You don't have a whole lot of choice," Sisko tried to explain.

"The Federation doesn't torture its prisoners, remember," Jordan stated. "I won't submit to hypnosis or any other procedure. Except on one condition."

Sisko didn't like Jordan's new-found assertiveness. It made him doubt the sincerity he'd finally been convinced of. But then, Jordan had been hard-headed about putting himself at risk to find Bashir. "No conditions."

"You haven't even heard it," Jordan threw back. "You might at least hear me out. I want you to tell my parents. Tell them the truth, that I--" He let out a breath at the mistake. "That their son," he corrected, "was cloned by the Dominion. If we found out what happened to him, you can tell them that, too, but tell them about me."

"What good will that do?" Sisko asked.

Jordan's shoulders softened. "Probably none, but it's really all I have left, isn't it?"

Sisko turned away, thinking. Would he want to know, if it was Jake? He couldn't face even the thought. Finally, he nodded. "I'll have Doctor Barton here in the morning."

Jordan shook his head. "Look at this from my perspective, Captain," he said. "Would you want to wait and stew about it? Or would you want to know? This is for me as much as it is for you. Have him come now."

"It's late," Sisko said.

"Please!" Jordan begged.

Sisko didn't nod or shake his head. He just walked away.

* * *

><p>Jake woke up, satisfied with his life as a writer. He could sleep in. He sat up and looked across the room. Doctor Bashir was still sleeping. Kukalaka had only the day before given up his place on the table in the living room. Bashir slept with the bear now. He had it now, clutched to his chest, as he twitched with whatever nightmare was tormenting him this time. The camp, the Dominion, Section 31--that Jake wasn't supposed to know about--or maybe just remembering the days before he started losing his mind. Those were the worst, Jake decided, since Bashir had never acted so depressed by the other experiences as he was by this one.<p>

Jake checked the time. 10:30. Late enough. Doctor Bashir needed breakfast. Jake's own stomach growled and he amended the thought. They both needed breakfast. "Doctor," he called, careful to keep his voice gentle. Bashir did not wake well to shouts. "Time to get up."

Bashir stirred but didn't wake. That was unusual. Bashir was usually a very light sleeper. "Doctor?" Jake tried again, slipping off the bed. He hated to touch him. The doctor didn't wake well to that either. It was worse than shouting, because of those dreams he had. Still, he had to wake up. Everyone would really worry if he didn't, especially Jake. Jake tiptoed to Bashir's bed and slowly reached out a hand. Then he thought better of it. Touching him when he was asleep was really bad. Better to try speaking again. He squatted down and leaned closer to the doctor. "Doctor Bashir," he began.

Bashir's eyes flew open and he jumped backwards so quickly that he fell off the other side of the bed. Jake cringed. Bad. Bashir recovered quickly though, which was the silver lining on this particular cloud. He sat up and leaned back against the bed. Jake stood up. Bashir still wasn't facing him, but he was rubbing his hands over his face. Things would go easier now. "Sorry about that," Jake told him, "but you weren't waking up. Bad dreams again?"

Bashir spun around and stared at Jake as if he had just sprouted wings. "What?" he asked.

Maybe not so easy, Jake thought. "Are you okay?" he asked, expecting Bashir's usual negative answer.

But that look, that shocked, confused, I'm-staring-at-a-freak look never left Bashir's face. Finally he moved, putting up a hand to stop Jake from saying anything else. "Kira," he said.

This was a completely new reaction. "You want me to get Kira?"

Bashir stood, apparently still scared. "Kira!" he repeated.

"Okay," Jake nodded, backing away, "okay. I'll get Kira." He was starting to be afraid himself. Jake had been living with Bashir for a several days now, and things seemed to be holding steady with the doctor's intellectual state. But it was apparent, to Bashir and to himself, that something had happened. Things had gotten worse for Bashir. Jake felt bad. Things were bad enough.

* * *

><p>Kira was in Ops when the call came. "What's wrong, Jake?" Dax looked over at her, but she didn't say anything.<p>

"I don't know," Jake said, over the comm line, "something's changed. I don't know what, and Doctor Bashir can't tell me. He asked for you. It's all he would say."

Kira nodded. Ops could manage without her for a little while. "I'll be right down."

Thoughts ran through her mind as the turbolift carried her to the Habitat Ring. Something had changed, Jake had said. Kira tried to think, to anticipate what it could be. She thought about calling Dr. Girani, but didn't know that that would do any good, especially when she didn't know the situation. Besides she had done little good so far, not that it was her fault. Every test they ran still showed up normal. Bashir was anything but normal, but there were no more tests to run.

She didn't bother with the door chime since Jake knew she was coming. Jake was setting breakfast on the table when she entered. Julian was sitting on the couch. But he got up and met her at the door. He reached out and took her arms, looking into her eyes with intense urgency. "Say something," he said.

"What should I say?" she asked in return, looking to Jake. Jake shook his head. Julian's shoulders dropped and he released his hold on her. He turned away and leaned his head against the wall. Something had happened. "Julian, what is it? What's wrong? Jake?"

Julian turned, a little of the intensity had returned. His eyes showed hope. "Maybe slower," he suggested.

Slower? Kira thought. And then the realization hit. She remembered Bashir's expression from before. Doctor Surmak Ren had looked at her like that when she had contracted the aphasia virus and started speaking gibberish instead of words. "Julian," she said, slowing her words as he had requested, "if you can understand me, nod your head right now."

He stared blankly back at her. He sighed and looked away, to the table where Jake was watching them both. He bit his bottom lip and shook his head slowly.

Now Kira took his arms in hers. "We'll figure it out, Julian," she told him, knowing he didn't understand. "I promise." His eyes met hers and she saw the same hurt there, the hopelessness that he had started carrying around the last week. "I promise."

He took another deep breath and then said, "I'm going to eat breakfast. You can talk to Jake now."

Kira let him go. He sat with his back to her, allowing her to talk to Jake in what amounted now to privacy. Jake came over to her. "But he can still talk," he whispered.

"Don't whisper, Jake," she told him. "He can probably still get tone

of voice. Whispering sounds conspiratorial. We need to sound reassuring." A sharp pain was building in her throat.

Jake nodded. He looked back at Bashir. "Maybe he was right, then."

"About what?"

Jake shrugged. "He said something about coming undone. His enhancements. Maybe they _are_ coming undone."

Kira shook her head. She was watching Bashir, too. "I thought about that. I called his mother. She dug up his records from before the enhancements. I might have agreed before this. But he could speak then."

"And if he learned to speak," Jake concluded, "he'd have to understand what was spoken to him."

"At least to a point." Kira turned away so she couldn't see Julian, and more importantly, so he couldn't see her. "I don't know what to do," she whispered, ignoring her own orders. "He's slipping away."

"What's worse," Jake added, dropping his own voice, "he knows it. I'd rather lose it all at once and never know what hit me. He knows."

Kira nodded, unable to speak without upsetting Bashir even more. She took a few deep breaths and touched Jake on the arm. "Thank you for staying with him, Jake," she said finally.

Jake shrugged, but he blushed a little. "He would do it for me," he said. "For any of us."

Kira smiled at that, though it didn't make her feel any better. "Yes," she agreed, "he would."

* * *

><p>A chair had been placed inside the cell. Jordan--the clone--sat down slowly and placed his hands flat on the arms of the chair. He stared forward to where Doctor Barton sat, just outside the cell. Captain Sisko stood with Chief Vndara and Admiral Ross in the next room. Sisko shifted his weight as he watched the viewscreen. He wanted to be in the room. Whatever was left of Jordan was in that clone. If the hypnosis was successfull, that last remnant of a good officer, a good man, might be lost.<p>

The viewscreen provided no sound at this point. Sisko could only watch. Doctor Barton's back was to him, so he couldn't see the process by which the doctor hypnotized the young man. But he could see Jordan's eyes close and his head fall forward. And he could see that head snap up again, with eyes wide and dangerous. Vndara touched a control and there was sound.

"What is your name?" Barton asked.

"Jordan, Joseph Jr.," the clone replied, his tone angry.

"Rank?"

"Lieutenant JG." The expression on the face never changed. He just looked dangerous. He sat still, stared forward.

"Where were you created?" Barton hadn't wasted time on the neutral questions.

"Cardassia IV." And Jordan didn't waste time on neutral answers.

"Is that where the original Joseph Jordan, Jr. is being held?"

"The original was terminated. He was no longer necessary."

If the questions bothered him, Barton didn't show it. His voice was steady when he asked, "Who killed him?"

"I was ordered to terminate him."

"Ordered by whom?"

"Pedron."

"Is Pedron a Vorta?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been aboard the Defiant in the original's place?"

"Two months, three weeks, four days, five hours--"

"That is sufficient," Barton cut him off. "Are there others like you?"

"No. I am the first."

"First," Barton repeated. "Will there be others?"

"If I am successful."

"You are a prototype," Barton concluded. "What was your mission? What would prove you successful?"

"Bashir."

Sisko stepped closer to the viewscreen. Why Bashir?

"Why Bashir?" Barton asked, as if reading Sisko's mind.

"He is a risk."

Barton shook his head. Sisko knew why. They were only getting terse answers, not complete ones. "Why is he a risk?"

"He is intelligent, more than other solids."

"There are others like him. Why just Bashir?"

"He is in Starfleet. He is assigned to Deep Space Nine and the _Defiant_."

"You have opportunity then, because your original is in Starfleet and is assigned to Deep Space Nine and the _Defiant_." Barton jotted a few notes on the PADD he had beside him. "Bashir is only test. A test of your success?"

"Yes."

"Why not sabotage the whole ship? Why not kill Bashir?"

"Discovery. Success could be proven but I would be discovered. There could be no more."

"You were not a success," Barton told him. "You were discovered anyway."

"But I was successful. Bashir has been neutralized."

Barton was silent for a few moments. Sisko understood. Barton was thinking, just as he was. It was easy to glance over that last statement, to take it as an argument only. But the clone was hypnotized and cooperative. He had not argued once. He was stating a fact. Bashir was neutralized. Discovered or not, the clone had been successful. There might still be others.

Admiral Ross had understood, too. "We'll just have to run more DNA scans on a regular basis. We know what to look for now."

"You say that like there's no hope for Bashir," Sisko said, turning.

"Not now," Ross admonished. "We'll discuss this later." He turned his attention back to the monitor.

"When I clap my hands," Barton was saying, "you will waken, with no memory of this interview." He clapped.

Jordan blinked a few times and then gripped the chair hard. A slow snarl spread across his face. "Obedience is victory," he said. "Victory is life!" Then he threw himself into the forcefield that held him in the cell.

Barton instinctively backed away. The forcefield shimmered and strained, shocking Jordan as he again fell against it. Now he picked up the chair, swinging it against the field and against the walls. Sisko left the viewscreen and headed for the door that would take him into the brig. Vndara opened it for him, and the three of them went in. Just as they did, the chair thrashed again against the wall, and one of its legs came off with a jagged end. Jordan threw away the rest of the chair and grasped the broken leg. He held it up against himself, pressing the point into his chest.

"Sleep!" Barton shouted and clapped his hands together. Jordan went limp, falling like a puppet whose strings had been cut. The broken piece of chair landed a few feet from his hand, but he made no further move toward it. Jordan's eyes were closed. He was sleeping.

"What can we do?" Ross asked, turning away from Jordan. He motioned for Sisko to follow him back outside. "We can't have him reenanced. It's illegal. There's no way to be sure it would work anyway. There's nothing we can do for him. I know you don't like that. I don't like it either. He was a good doctor. He's not anymore. He can't be. He's been relieved of duty." He took a breath and Sisko didn't think he'd like what he heard next. "And he's been ordered to the Institute. They'll do what they can for him there."

Sisko just couldn't let it go. "Then they'll win," he argued. "You heard what he said. Unless his mission failed, there would be more of them. He thinks his mission has succeeded. And it has! Bashir has been neutralized. He's no longer a threat. They'll send more."

"And we have the means of detecting them," Ross held. "Starfleet Command has made up its mind on this, Captain. And Starfleet Medical concurs."

Sisko heard something in those two sentences. He flushed with heat and anger. "They've been looking for this, haven't they?" he accused, stopping in the middle of the corridor. "He's given them nothing but loyal and valuable service for six years, and they can't wait to get rid of him because he's enhanced. Makes them look bad. But they just couldn't toss him out. His record was too good. They were hoping for something like this. How convenient for them!"

"That will be enough, Captain!" Ross ordered, turning to face him with eyes like thunder. "He is to be transported to the Institute before the week is out. Understood?"

Sisko glared back at him. "Understood," he spat. Turning on his heels, he left Ross and marched back to the docking area. Once aboard the Defiant, he nearly choked. The ship was in pieces. They had torn her apart.

"It is not as bad as it looks," a deep, rough voice spoke from behind him. He turned to see Worf with the rest of the crew flanked behind him all the way down the corridor.

"It's been worse," O'Brien agreed. "And we were able to fix it then."

"This time," Nog added, "there is a starbase nearby."

"We will work extra shifts," Worf stated. "Round the clock."

Barton pushed his way from the back, smiling. "Who needs sleep anyway?" He drew himself to attention. "Doctor Barton, reporting for duty."

"Hensing decided he liked the starbase better," O'Brien explained.

Sisko looked at them. His crew. His loyal crew. They were a family. Sisko felt like smiling, but didn't. "Then let's get to work."

* * *

><p>It turned out that Jake was rather inventive. Or maybe he'd just learned it from Bashir and the few things he did tell about his time

in the camp when no one spoke his language. Jake used his hands to make himself understood, at least about simple things. Time to eat, time to leave, that sort of thing. He even did something Bashir hadn't thought to do in the camps, even if he'd had the materials necessary. He drew pictures. They weren't great pictures. Just scribbles on a convenient PADD. But they got the idea across where his voice couldn't.<p>

And Bashir appreciated it, more than he could tell Jake. To him, it meant that he still had something. He could still understand things, at least on a visual level. Jake still spoke to him, even though he couldn't understand his words. On one level it was nice to hear another voice. On another level it frustrated him greatly that he couldn't comprehend what was being said.

He pushed the button Jake had showed him, ending the log he'd just tried to record. He hadn't said anything though. He had decided to take it up again, in a burst of desperation. But he found he had little to say. All he could do was complain about what he'd lost. It wasn't what he wanted to leave behind. He'd rather leave nothing at all.

The door opened without even a chime. It was Jake. Julian knew it before the door even opened. But Jake had something in his arms. Something familiar. And something alive. "I brought a surprise!," Jake said, smiling. His voice was bright and the smile was big. Bashir stood up to meet him at the door. He was about to drop the thing, because he had other things in his arms that weren't alive. The live thing wiggled and complained. It meowed. "Chester is going to stay with us for awhile."

"Chester," Bashir wasn't sure if he'd understood the word or if it was just a memory attached to the animal Jake was holding. He reached out and picked up the struggling cat, much to Jake's relief.

"Mrs. O'Brien doesn't really like him," Jake was saying. Bashir heard only useless syllables. Bashir turned away, setting the cat on the floor and watching it sniff its way around the unfamiliar room. Jake kept talking. "She didn't have any complaints about us borrowing him. Molly was a little sad though. I had to promise we'd give him back. I thought he'd be good for you. He doesn't speak exactly. You don't have to understand him."

Bashir was fascinated. He had never really paid much attention to Chester before when he'd visited Miles. But he found the cat enthralling now. He'd had nothing else to focus on lately. Nothing to occupy his mind. He'd slept most of the morning simply out of boredom. But now he had the cat. It moved about the room, cautiously stepping into every corner, sniffing every piece of furniture. It jumped up onto the couch and put its front paws on the window. Then it jumped down and padded into the bedroom. Julian let it go and turned back to Jake.

Jake was putting some of the other things on the table. There were a few balls which jingled when Julian picked them up. There was brush with very soft bristles. Julian reasoned that since they had come with the cat, they must belong to the cat. There was a stuffed mouse, too, which made him sure. It was attached to a string that was attached to a short stick. "Toys," Julian said. Jake nodded, smiling. He spoke a few more syllables, but Julian wasn't listening. Chester

had come back from the bedroom and had found a place on the couch.

* * *

><p>Admiral Ross, wishing the Defiant well on its way, had offered starbase engineers--the ones who'd taken the ship apart--to help put the _Defiant_ back together. Sisko didn't know whether to be relieved or not. The sooner he was at the station, the less excuses he'd have for not delivering Bashir to the Institute. On the other hand, knowing what he knew about the clone and the experiment, he wanted to get Dr. Barton back to the station as soon as possible, so that maybe he could help Julian and there would be more grounds for argument on his former CMO's behalf.

It had been thirty-six hours already. The _Shiloh_ had already arrived to take Jordan to a maximum security facility back on Earth. They'd be taking off before the end of the day. The _Defiant_, on the other hand, would still be docked. O'Brien estimated another two days before the ship could safely leave. Ross, through some act of compassion, had rescinded his deadline in the wake of the _Defiant_'s condition. Bashir still had to go, but there was no way the _Defiant_ could get him to the Institute by the end of the week. And Sisko had insisted that he would take Bashir himself. No other ship was to be diverted. He'd reemphasized his insistence with facts. The war effort required ships. None should be diverted to ferry a mentally-handicapped former doctor to what would amount to oblivion. Sisko would take a runabout, leaving the _Defiant_ to continue to fight the war.

But that was still a few days away. For now, he plunged headlong down the Jefferies Tube into the bowels of the ship. Nog was waiting for him with a spanner and PADD detailing the work that needed to be done on the particular system O'Brien had assigned him to. "Thank you, Mr. Nog," Sisko said, taking the PADD and trying to sound cheerful. He looked over the extremely detailed instructions. "But you might remind the Chief that I designed this ship."

Nog grinned. "Yes, sir. I'll leave you to it then. I need to adjust the energy flow to propulsion. We've been getting some spikes."

Sisko watched him go, making much easier progress through the tubes than he had himself. _Sometimes,_ he thought, _it pays to be small._

8. Part Eight

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Eight****

Kira stopped by more often now, usually once a day just after her shift ended. She didn't talk much, but she either had dinner with

Jake and Bashir or she just visited awhile. Julian was glad she didn't say much, and he was glad that she came. It meant she cared. But it also felt awkward. He didn't know how to tell her that, though. In fact, he was finding it difficult to communicate at all.

Jake had noticed. His expressions--smiles meant to comfort before--had changed to confused frowns. It wasn't that Bashir was speaking gibberish, as with the aphasia virus, though he did occasionally mix words up. It was that he was having difficulty forming the words altogether. That had started two days before. "I can't hear me," he had told Jake, when the voice inside his head--his thoughts--became little more than unintelligible mumbles. By morning, the voice was silent. Julian had tried to greet Jake, but he couldn't find his way past the first "g." The rest of the word was lost. He knew what he wanted to say. He just couldn't make the words come out. He couldn't hear them in his own mind.

If he concentrated hard, he could get a few words to come together, but whole sentences were too much trouble. Most of the time, he couldn't even manage that, and it frustrated him. Jake had graciously stuck by him, searching out the meanings to his lack of words. They managed. Jake gave him a PADD and stylus and Bashir tried to draw what he wanted if it was too difficult to say. And sometimes he just drew to occupy the time.

There were fewer and fewer ways to do that anymore. He remembered--though he couldn't express it or even bring it into clear focus as a thought--being so pressed for time that he thought the days were too short. Now he felt they were monstrously long. He played with Chester when the cat was in the mood for playing. He brushed his long fur every day and even fed him, though Jake was the one to replicate the food. But cats were only active when they wanted to be, and like their larger cousins, that was only a fraction of the day. Bashir hadn't worked all that out, but he had noted that the cat was often asleep. And watching the sleeping cat was having a hypnotic effect on him. So, with nothing else to do to, he often followed the cat's lead and napped himself.

Sometimes, when Chester was not playful, but still fully conscious, they just sat together and Julian would draw, doodling pictures on the PADD Jake had given him. They were familiar pictures, though he couldn't recall what they depicted. He saw them in his mind though, so he drew them on the PADD.

This time when Kira came, she brought a bag with her and Jake was smiling again.

* * *

><p>Kira put on a smile she didn't really feel and stepped into the room. Jake grinned broadly and seemed more excited than Bashir about the gift she had brought. Of course, that wasn't hard. Julian didn't get excited anymore. He was depressed and bored and much too quiet. All of which, she understood. Why speak when you couldn't understand anyone else? Jake's enthusiasm was almost infectious though. Her smile started to feel more natural. "I brought you something," she told Julian, noting that he looked younger today. She'd noted that every evening when she walked in, so she shouldn't have taken it for a surprise. Still it shocked her. He wasn't actually getting younger.

It was just a perception. He was becoming simpler. More like a child with too many memories.<p>

He didn't understand her, but her voice did get his attention. He seemed curious about the bag and put the cat down to join her at the table. Jake, on the other hand, looked ready to burst. "I'm telling you, Nerys," he said--she'd insisted on him not calling her by her rank in such informal circumstances, "he's really talented. Even now."

She listened to Jake, but she handed the bag to Julian. "Jake says you're something of an artist," she said as he carefully pulled the pad of paper from the bag and set it out on the table. He drew the pencil box out next and looked inside the bag to see if there was anything else. "What does he draw?" she asked Jake.

"Medical stuff!" Jake sounded excited, which distracted Bashir from opening the box.

"P-paper?" he asked, looking for help from Jake.

"Oh," Jake dropped his thought and ran to get a PADD from the coffee table. "Yeah. See the PADD doesn't last." He drew a few circles on the PADD and showed them to Bashir. Then he pressed a key and the PADD was cleared. "Gone." Now he took the pad of paper, and, lifting its cover, he took a pen and drew a few circles on it. "Paper stays." He closed the cover and opened it again, proving that the circles did indeed remain on the paper.

Bashir took a deep breath and then nodded slowly. He took the pad back from Jake though and ripped out the first page with the circles. He peered more closely at the pencil box. "K--k--" He shook his head, obviously frustrated. "Col-color," he said finally.

"Yes!" Jake was grinning again. "Lots of colors." He nodded and Bashir opened it, investigating the many pens inside.

Kira felt like she wanted to cry. Julian was not suppose to be like this. He was brilliant, so brilliant she'd often wanted to slap him. But she never wanted to see him like this.

Jake wasn't ready to let her wallow though. "You should see them," he told her. "He kept erasing them on the PADD so he could draw something else. That's why I asked you to get the paper. Maybe it might help Doctor Girani to find what's wrong with him. He can't be stupid and draw like he does. Not medical stuff. Besides, it might give him something to get excited about."

Kira nodded, hoping that Jake was right. She glanced back over at Julian and realized he'd been ignoring them while they talked. That wasn't unusual. He'd stopped paying attention when he stopped talking. But this time it was different. Jake was right. He was drawing almost frantically, as if it was part of that frustration he felt in expressing himself. Kira stood up and moved closer so that she could see.

The paper was oddly covered in lines. Squiggly, horizontal lines, joined by straight diagonal ones to the space in the center of the paper, where he was just beginning to draw. He was drawing rough, uneven circles grouped closely together near the bottom of the page.

Each one was met by one of the diagonal lines. As she watched, he left the circles behind and moved to longer shapes, also attached to the diagonals. _Bones,_ she thought. He was drawing bones. She held up her hand, spreading her fingers. The circles weren't frantic at all. They weren't even circles. They were the bones of the human wrist--not so different from her own. The longer shapes were the fingers, just behind the palm of the hand. He drew each of the finger sections next and then dropped the pen so that he could fish another from the box.

A red pen. He drew blood vessels, snaking their way up the wrist in big ribbons that tapered and branched into small capillaries as they made their way up the fingers. A blue pen picked them up then and drew them back down, carrying the blood back to the heart.

Kira stayed longer than usual that night and she watched the hand form. He drew everything, nerves and tendons and finally, muscles. And each detail matched up with one of those diagonal lines connecting it to a squiggle. If Bashir was aware he was being watched, he didn't let on.

"What do you suppose the lines are?" Jake whispered.

Kira took a step closer. The drawing was not an artist's drawing--not even a medical artist. It was too precise, too exact. There was no shading or shadowing. Just details. Meticulous details. It hit her. "Labels," she breathed. "They're labels. Only the words don't mean anything to him any more."

When she left that evening, she took the hand drawing with her. Bashir was already working on another. An ear. He'd have a whole person within the week, Jake had joked.

"He could be a savant," Girani replied, after Kira had come to her quarters with the drawing. "I don't know what else to tell you. There's nothing physically wrong with him. I've never dealt with genetic enhancements before so I can't really narrow anything down. I can't say what has caused his decline, and I can't counteract it. I also can't tell you that it's going to reverse itself on the basis of a picture."

"I'm not asking you to," Kira said, trying to remain calm. "But can't this provide some kind of clue? He still remembers this. Somewhere in his mind, this makes sense to him. I talked with his mother again. He didn't draw before. Not like this. He wasn't a savant. It has to mean something."

"It might," Girani admitted, laying a hand on her shoulder. "But not to me. I'm not trying to be unkind, Colonel. But I've run every single test I could think of. I don't know any more tests. I don't know how to help him."

Kira returned to her quarters having lost much of the hope she'd taken from that drawing. She felt like Julian, the real Julian, was trapped inside his wounded mind, still whole but unable to get out. She placed the drawing on her own table and compared it again with her hand. It was perfect. The computer startled her. "You have an incoming signal, from Captain Benjamin Sisko, secure channel."

Kira turned away quickly and activated her communications viewscreen.

Sisko's face appeared almost immediately. She noted he wasn't on the bridge. He looked unhappy, just as he had the last time he called. She was sure he'd get right to the point. "How's Julian?"

That wasn't what she expected. "Better," she replied, "and worse. He's having trouble speaking. Girani has given up. She says she doesn't know what else to do."

"Starfleet thinks they do," Sisko spat. "Only I don't think they want to help him." He leaned back in his chair and touched his fingertips together. "The Dominion did it."

Kira thought he'd changed subjects. "What?"

"They did something to him," Sisko said, as if that clarified it. "I'll explain more when I get back. I'm bringing a doctor with me, one who knows what's going on. Maybe he can help."

"You said you didn't think Starfleet wanted to help him," she repeated his words, trying to coerce an explanation.

Sisko sighed. "They want me to take him to the Institute," he told her. "They're just going to lock him away."

"Dr. Loews wouldn't," Kira began.

"Probably not," Sisko cut her off. "But she's not the only one there. And he's not going to be in the same league with the other enhanced patients now. I get the feeling they're just hoping he'll disappear quietly and everyone will forget about the one that slipped past them."

"I won't forget," Kira said. She almost said 'we,' but changed her mind. Sisko would have to say that himself. She'd noticed the coldness between Julian and the captain before this illness. Sisko was the one who was cold. Bashir just seemed angry. She had understood Julian more than the captain. Julian had stayed.

"Neither will I," Sisko agreed, but his expression held a question. He had caught her thoughts.

"When will you be back?" Kira asked, ignoring his expression and the question. Let him question.

"Tomorrow. I want to give Barton some time with him."

"Barton?" Kira didn't recognize the name. "Not Hensing."

"Hensing didn't seem to take well to the station."

She nodded. "Or to Julian."

* * *

><p>Julian was already awake when Jake woke up. He was drawing again, but not the meticulous medical illustrations he had been drawing all last night. Jake picked up one of the drawings from the coffee table and held it up. The lines weren't as sure as the medical drawings. The details weren't as clear. But it was unmistakable. It was a face. A real face, not a model of a face. It was the face of a young man.

Jake didn't recognize him. There were other faces below that one, hastily drawn. He didn't recognize any of them. They might have been Starfleet officers or other people Bashir knew. But they looked too poor to be Starfleet.<p>

There was another picture below it, one with almost no clear form at all. The paper was covered with blurred faces, and the whole picture was covered over with an orange haze. The first one drawn, Jake surmised. Another nightmare. Bashir had drawn what he saw in his dreams.

Bashir was working on another person when Jake approached him. This one wore a dark uniform and an evil grin. Jake wondered if it was the changeling from the camp, the one who masqueraded as a guard. His hand shook as he drew, and his foot tapped nervously on the floor.

Bashir looked up to see who was behind him, and then dropped his head again to the picture. "Sl--" he tried. "Sloan." He pointed to the man in the picture. Jake wasn't sure of the name, but it didn't sound like the changeling. It also didn't sound like Jem'Hadar or Vorta. Section 31 perhaps. It was obvious from the picture that Bashir didn't hold the man in high regard.

There wasn't time to really ponder it though. Something furry brushed hard against Jake's leg and then meowed. Chester was hungry. "Time for breakfast," Jake said, as much to Bashir as to the cat. "What would you like?"

Bashir put the pad away, and got up to pack away all the pictures. Chester followed his every step, meowing loudly for his morning meal. But Bashir ignored him. He gathered up the pictures roughly and wadded them together. He met Jake at the replicator and placed the paper inside. Jake wasn't sure what to do. "You don't want them?" he asked, knowing that it wouldn't help to ask.

"Away," Bashir said, raising his voice and flipping his hand toward the papers. "Go."

"Alright," Jake said. He pressed a control and the papers dematerialized, broken up into their individual atoms in order to be reconstituted into something else. The pictures were gone. Chester stretched up from the floor to reach his front paws towards the replicator. He meowed pitifully.

Bashir smiled, his agitation seemingly gone with the pictures. He picked up the cat and both waited for Jake to replicate the cat's breakfast. Bashir sat the bowl on the floor, and he petted the cat as he ate. Content now to be well-fed and attended to, Chester purred.

The door chimed, surprising Jake. He still wasn't dressed. He expected Kira to come by in the evening, but he didn't know who would be here this morning. Bashir was looking around the room, trying to find the source of the sound. Jake pointed toward the door. "Come in," he said.

The door swished open. "Morning, Jake-o," his father said, stepping inside. Jake smiled. Bashir left the cat and stood. He didn't seem happy to see the captain. He didn't look unhappy either, so it wasn't

all that strange to Jake. There was another man with the captain, a Starfleet officer in blue trim. Another doctor, Jake guessed.

"Dad." Jake went to him and shook his hand. "You're back. When did you get in?"

"Ten minutes ago." The elder Sisko turned to Bashir, who stared back at him blankly. "Julian," Sisko began, "we know why this happened. This is Doctor Barton. He wants to help you."

"He can't understand you," Jake told them. "He can't really talk now either."

"How do you communicate with him?" Barton asked.

Jake shrugged. "I talk anyway, but I also use my hands. We draw pictures. He's really good at that." Jake went to the coffee table and picked up Bashir's pad of paper. He turned the cover over and showed the first drawing to Barton. It was the ear. "He draws things like this, too. Medical things."

Barton seemed interested and took the pad from Jake. "Gray's Anatomy," he mumbled, more to himself than to the others. "He drew this?"

Jake nodded. "He started with the labels and then drew the picture in. From the inside out. Bones first, then blood vessels, muscles, etc."

Barton flipped to the nose on the next page, then a foot, an eye. "They are all straight out of Gray's Anatomy. It doesn't appear his memory has been affected."

"Doctor Girani didn't seem to think it mattered," Jake told him. "She stopped running tests. Everything always came out normal."

"Everything had to come out normal," Sisko broke in, "or we might have been able to help him. Maybe we still can." For the first time, he seemed to stop and look at Jake. "Have you had breakfast?"

Jake shook his head.

"Get dressed, eat something, and then bring Bashir down to the Infirmary. 1030 hours, Jake. We might not have a lot of time."

"Or what?" Jake asked, now getting worried. Not a lot of time? He hadn't thought about it yet, but if Bashir continued to decline, it wasn't beyond reason that he might die.

"Or he'll be institutionalized," Barton answered, "and we'll all have lost a great doctor."

"1030, Jake. Don't be late."

Jake was relieved. At least he wouldn't die. But life in an institution didn't sound much better, not when he couldn't speak or understand people. "We'll be there."

Barton handed the pad to Bashir, but the captain stopped in the

doorway. "And you might want to call the Chief and tell him where his cat is."

* * *

><p>Bashir watched them leave. He recognized the captain, of course, but he didn't know who the second man was or why he wanted his paper. He was glad though when the man gave it back. Jake seemed to forget about the encounter because he went right back to getting food from the thing on the wall. He was glad for that, too. He didn't feel like drawing right now and, since Chester was eating, he couldn't play with the cat either. Besides, he was hungry too.<p>

It turned out to be a simple breakfast, but one of his favorites. Scones and jam. Jake ate quickly and then hurried into the other room to dress, so Bashir finished his own food and found the brush for Chester. Jake came back out and said something. He hurried around the room, picking up the dishes from the table. Julian put the cat down and picked up the cat dish from the floor. He followed Jake to the thing on the wall and watched as the dishes disappeared.

"Ready to go?" Jake asked him, gesturing toward the door.

Bashir followed his hands but didn't understand what Jake was getting at. It was a door.

"Good," Jake sighed. "Let's go." He took Bashir's arm and gently pulled him toward the door.

Bashir followed, thinking that it must have something to do with the captain. But he was a little nervous. He hadn't been out for a few days, and things had been different then. He was better then, worse than he used to be, but better than he was now. He thought maybe people would laugh at him the way the other children had when he was little. He didn't want them to call him names.

Jake was thoughtful and let go of his arm once they were in the corridor. There were only a few people out, and they hardly paid attention at all. The station looked bigger now. He felt dizzy walking down the long crossover bridge, but he told himself it was the same station. Only he had changed. He trusted Jake and followed where he led.

The Promenade was crowded and noisy, at least until he was noticed. Much of the sound faded then, and people did stop and stare. If anyone was calling him names, he didn't understand them. But mostly he saw people smile. He wondered why they were happy.

Two men, wearing tan uniforms, stood outside the Infirmary, but they were also happy, and they smiled as Jake and Bashir passed them. Sisko was inside with Kira and Doctor Girani. But the other man was there, too. Jabara smiled at him and took his hand, leading him to a biobed. Julian knew what it was and what it meant, but his thoughts had stopped being sounds in his head. All he had left were pictures. He struggled with the word. "Tes?" he finally managed.

Jabara nodded. "Just a few." She patted the bed, and Julian sat down on it. The strange man came over and began to run the tests while Girani hung back. Kira and Sisko spoke together. Julian didn't understand the test so he watched Kira. She was angry. Sisko was

talking. He was making her angry. He could understand that even if he didn't know what Sisko was saying.

* * *

><p>"But if they know about the clone, why won't they try to help him?" She asked, and Sisko felt she was attacking him, as if he was simply Starfleet's representative.<p>

"I'm on your side, Colonel," he shot back, hoping she'd take the hint and target her anger at the proper source. "Julian's side. I don't want him institutionalized either."

"But what good does it do to know?" Girani stepped in. "If the Dominion did this, they've meant for it to be undetectable. They are more advanced in genetics and neurology. There is still so much we don't understand that we may never detect the problem in his lifetime. I've run every test available, and I couldn't find anything. Barton won't either. So what will you do when the admiral calls you again and demands Bashir be delivered?"

Kira was watching him for an answer. He didn't like what he was going to say--what he had to say. "Then I'll have to take him." He had to leave. "Do your best. Excuse me."

* * *

><p>The man he didn't know did not seem happy. He shook his head and spoke in tones Julian remembered his father using back before the hospital, before he'd been changed. For a moment, his father's face replaced the other man's. The Infirmary became his childhood bedroom, and he could almost make out the words his father spoke.<p>

"I don't know what's wrong with you, Jules," his father said. Then his face changed back to the new man and the words were lost again. Julian didn't know what the tests meant, but he knew he should feel bad. The new man was disappointed in him.

He looked to Kira and saw his mother's expression. She wasn't happy either. She was sad. Kira walked him home that evening and stayed with him for awhile. But he didn't feel like drawing. He just sat with the cat who purred in his lap. Jake returned later and made dinner after Kira left. Julian didn't feel like eating, but he couldn't tell Jake that, so he ate anyway and then went to bed early. Jake didn't try to talk to him or get him to draw or play with the cat. Something bad was happening, and Julian felt it was about him.

* * *

><p>There were more tests the next day. Girani had gone home, wishing Barton luck, but there was little luck to be had. And so Sisko called a meeting with the senior staff. Chief O'Brien listened at first but then he couldn't hear at all. Starfleet had ordered that Julian be delivered to the Institute. It figured. They kept all the "mutants" there. Kira tried arguing. If they knew the reason for his illness, they should try and reverse it. Sisko calmly explained that that was what Doctor Barton had been trying to do. He was too calm. Julian was going to be filed away and forgotten. Sisko should have been angry. He should have been enraged. O'Brien was. He squirmed in his seat and

pretended to be listening. Sisko was telling about the clone that had replaced Lieutenant Jordan.<p>

The only thing O'Brien really heard after that was "tomorrow." Sisko was taking Julian away tomorrow and that was going to be the end of it. Barton would stay on as Chief Medical Officer, at least until Starfleet sent them someone permanent. Hensing had put in for a transfer and was dead set against coming back to DS Nine. O'Brien didn't mind. He didn't want Hensing back, taking over Julian's Infirmary. He didn't want anyone else in there except Julian, and it made him angry to think that Starfleet would just give up on him like that.

And then he remembered what Julian had said to him. If he had to leave the station, he wanted to go home to Earth. Unable to keep silent now, he stood up, interrupting what the captain was saying. "He wants to go home."

"What?" Sisko asked, completely perplexed.

"Julian," O'Brien said again. "He wants to go home. He told me that before we left. If he had to leave, he wanted to go home. He should be with his family if that's what he wants."

Sisko stood still, speechless. Everyone else looked between them. "I thought about that, Chief," Sisko finally said. "I argued, too."

"So that's just it then?" O'Brien couldn't hold it back. "We just give up on him? There's not one person in this room who wouldn't be dead if it wasn't for him, and we're just going to let them stick him in a cell somewhere?"

"That's enough!" Sisko stood up even straighter, which O'Brien wouldn't have thought possible. He towered. "Go home, Chief."

They stood staring at each other, neither willing to back down, for a few moments. But in this instance, Sisko's rank tilted the scales in his favor. Or so it seemed. O'Brien turned and marched out of the room without another word. But he didn't plan on going home.

Garak wasn't his favorite person. In fact, he wasn't sure he really trusted Garak. Of course, he trusted him to a certain extent. Garak and Dukat had a history, and Garak hated the Dominion and sincerely--as much as Garak could be sincere--wanted them off his home planet. But O'Brien still didn't trust him deep down. Garak held too much a secret, kept everyone at bay. But he was also extremely resourceful, and that could be turned to advantage. He was also Julian's friend. And that had to count for something.

It was still early in the day and Garak had not yet left his shop for lunch. He wasn't working. Well, not on clothes. He had a PADD in his hand. More Cardassian transmissions, O'Brien suspected. Garak looked up when O'Brien entered, and seemed quite surprised. "Chief," he said, "can I do something for you?"

"I don't know," O'Brien replied honestly. "But it's not for me."

* * *

><p>Garak set the PADD down on his counter and regarded Chief O'Brien

closely. The man's normally light-colored face was red. His eyes spoke of anger, as did his quickened breath and tensed muscles. "Then for our mutual friend, the good doctor?"<p>

O'Brien nodded. "They're going to lock him away."

Garak didn't relish the idea of Bashir being locked away, but he decided, as usual, that it wasn't good to show all one's cards at once. "Whatever do you mean?"

"Captain Sisko's taking him to the Institute tomorrow." O'Brien didn't seem to sense that Garak was stalling, drawing him out. His anger and frustration blinded him to such subtleties. Despite his many assertions to the contrary, Garak liked emotional people. They were easier to manipulate--if manipulation was necessary. He wasn't sure that it was. Still, best to see all the other man's cards before deciding. "Then he'll be in good hands. Your Federation doctors, I'm sure, will care for him well." He picked up the PADD again and made a show of reading it.

"They won't!" O'Brien exclaimed, taking the PADD and slamming it down on the counter. "They aren't going to try and help him at all. They're just going to lock him away. We can't let them do that."

Garak turned and gave the engineer his full attention. "What would you have us do to the contrary? He's incapable of remaining here as Chief Medical Officer. Neither Doctor Barton nor Counselor Dax have been able to help him. Perhaps this was meant to be. Genetic enhancement is a risky business. He was fine for awhile but now he isn't, and he needs full-time care."

O'Brien turned away, but his voice was more controlled when he spoke again. "It's not right, Garak, and it wasn't 'meant to be.' This was done to him deliberately."

Now he sincerely had Garak's full attention. "By whom? And what was done exactly?"

"We're not sure what was done." O'Brien turned back around. "But it was the Dominion that did it. They sabotaged his quarters. It did something to him. And now Starfleet is just going to give up on him. And Sisko's just going to let them."

Now Garak turned away, his mind churning. Why would the Dominion sabotage Bashir and not the rest of the station? And what had they done to him to cause his present condition? He understood Starfleet's reaction. Bashir was genetically enhanced, something they've feared since the days of Kahn and the Eugenics Wars. He wouldn't have become a doctor at all if they had known. But Sisko confused him. Why would Sisko give up so easily?

But most importantly Garak's mind was trying to come up with alternatives. O'Brien didn't give him time. "We could take him home. To his parents. Tonight. I can get us a runabout."

"That is the first place they'd look," Garak countered, giving up all thoughts of manipulation. He was in. "They won't be content to just let him stay there."

"Well, I don't see you coming up with any ideas," O'Brien threw back.

"But I have, Chief," Garak said. "They want to hold the doctor because of his present condition. But if he wasn't in his present condition, they would have to abide by their past agreement to let him remain." He turned to his counter and pulled up a file on the computer.

O'Brien's brows pulled down over his eyes. "_We_ are going to cure him? _We_ don't even know what's wrong with him. Barton couldn't figure it out. You said that yourself."

"Not us," Garak told him, with a slight smile, "and not Barton." His fingers played on the console until he found the information he wanted. He motioned O'Brien over so that he could see the screen. Listed on it were Bashir's medical records.

"How did you get Julian's medical files?" O'Brien asked. Garak looked at him from the corner of his eye, a sly smile just touching the corners of his mouth. "Never mind." There were some things he preferred not to know. He looked closer at the file Garak had called up. Now that his secret was out, the records in question had been added to Bashir's file.

"I think there's someone better," Garak said, scrolling through the documents. He stopped the screen near the top of the third page. On it was listed a doctor's name and the hospital's location. Adigeon Prime.

* * *

><p>Captain Sisko could feel them seething even through his office door. Each of the members of his senior staff--except Worf--had come to his office in turn, hoping to change or at least protest his decision. He turned each of them away. If they wanted to discuss repairs or supplies or war-time docking procedures that was fine. The door to his office was open. But if it was Bashir they wanted to talk about, he'd turn them away. And they seethed. They kept their tongues, but they glared at him before turning sharply back toward Ops.<p>

It was a hard thing, turning them away like that. They would think him cold or perhaps uncaring. They wouldn't know that he felt just like they did. He didn't want Julian just pushed aside. It angered him that Starfleet was so willing to give up on him, that they were actually looking for a way to get rid of him.

But he had orders. Strict orders. He also had a plan. That plan would cost him a lot and possibly gain nothing. There was no point in costing anyone else. Just him. And Julian, but Julian had little left to lose. So Sisko carried the burden squarely on his own shoulders, and that was the way it was going to stay.

* * *

><p>It was late that night when Chief O'Brien slipped out of bed. He was careful not to wake Keiko. She stirred a bit, but remained asleep. O'Brien walked around the bed and picked up his uniform. He dressed in the living room and stepped out the door. He'd set

everything up during the day. Garak would take care of Julian. O'Brien would be the diversion. He hadn't liked it that way, but he understood once Garak had explained it. O'Brien would lose his career over what they'd planned. Garak wasn't in Starfleet. He was likely to be caught and incarcerated for some time, but the repercussions were less permanent for him. Besides, O'Brien had a family to think about, Garak had reminded him. So O'Brien headed for the turbolift.<p>

"Ops," he ordered, once it arrived. The officer on duty seemed surprised to see him there. "I just couldn't sleep," O'Brien told him. "Thought I'd check on that EPS conduit that was giving me problems earlier. Don't mind me."

"Sure thing, Chief," the Bajoran replied.

But the timing was perfect and all of Ops went dark before he even reached the engineering pit. "Oh hell," he called, trying to sound fed up. Inside he was cheering and crossing mental fingers.

* * *

><p>Nog had been yawning when he stepped out of the turbolift, but he stopped when he heard the noise. It was tapping and beeps. A tricorder, but not a Federation one. Not Bajoran. Cardassian. He edged forward, careful to keep his distance. The corridor was empty and dimly lit. It was late. But the tapping continued. He moved on. There was a short side corridor which led to quarters. Bashir's quarters, where Jake was staying. The tapping was louder there. And then it stopped. Nog peered around the corner just as the door opened. A dark figure slipped through the door. But Nog had seen him. He turned away as the door closed and went back to the main corridor to call for Security.<p>

* * *

><p>Garak waited in the darkness and then moved into the bedroom. Bypassing the main door to the quarters had been easy. The bedroom would be harder. He could sedate Bashir easily enough, but Jake was a liability. He'd have to be sedated, too. His eyes had already adjusted to the dim light of Bashir's quarters, and his eyes soon adjusted to the darkness now. Jake's cot was at the other end of the room from Bashir's bed. Bashir's back was to the Cardassian, which would make it that much easier to administer the hypospray. Jake was facing him. He might wake up and recognize him before the drug took effect.<p>

Until that moment, Garak had been as silent as the darkness. The hypospray itself hissed quietly, no more than a short breath of air. Jake stiffened once but Garak held his eyes closed until the boy went limp again.

* * *

><p>In Ops, O'Brien made a good show of working feverishly to bring Ops' systems back online. But everything had been planned to the smallest detail. Each system would come up in turn as he and the other technicians worked on it. But he would choose the order. Communications had already been brought back online and the captain called. But it wouldn't matter. Security sensors to the runabout pad

would matter.<p>

But he wasn't expecting the call that came. It was Keiko. Kirayoshi was burning up. He'd been vomiting, too. She was going to take the kids to the Infirmary where Doctor Girani could examine the baby. O'Brien had a moment's thought about Garak and Julian.

"It's alright, Chief," Nolin said. "We can take it from here. You're off duty anyway."

And O'Brien knew they could. They had to. His children meant more. "I'll meet you there," he told his wife. He gave one look back at Ops before the turbolift lowered. Garak was on his own.

* * *

><p>Sisko was annoyed at first when the call came so late at night. But he was instantly awake when he heard the message. Garak had broken into Bashir's quarters. Jake was in Bashir's quarters. Most of Sisko's mind told him that Garak wouldn't hurt either of them. But there was another part of his mind that told him never to make assumptions about the Cardassian. He told Odo to send a Security team, but not to enter the quarters. He would go himself.<p>

* * *

><p>Garak was packing Bashir's bag when he heard the door open. He thought about hiding but it was too late. A tall figure stood in the doorway. He recognized its voice. "Lights," Sisko called. The computer dutifully obeyed and the light stung Garak's eyes. "Garak," Sisko said. He motioned with a finger for Garak to follow.<p>

Garak saw no other course of action so he went out to the living room. But Sisko went further than that and ushered him into the corridor. "What do you think you were trying to do?" There was more light out there, and Garak guessed that Sisko did not exactly trust him.

* * *

><p>"More than you," Garak shot back.<p>

"What's that supposed to mean?" Sisko took a step closer, and Garak almost worried that the captain would hit him again.

"I was trying to help him," Garak replied, deeming that the truth wouldn't hurt. It might even persuade Sisko to bend his orders and let the Cardassian finish what he'd started. "You were only going to ship him off."

Garak caught the slight shift in Sisko's eyes. "I have orders," he said. "I don't like them, but I have to obey them. Bashir is a Starfleet officer. He'd understand."

"No," Garak argued, "he wouldn't. He'd break any order if it meant helping a patient."

"But we can't help him," Sisko contended. "We've tried everything we can think of. The Institute might have better luck."

"How easy it would be to simply wash your hands of it all," Garak pushed. "They won't even try. Have they helped the other genetically enhanced patients they have?" He heard footsteps pounding up the corridor behind him.

"I'm sorry, Garak," Sisko said, nodding to the Security officers. "I've done what I could. My runabout leaves in the morning," he told the others. "Hold him until I'm away."

"Any formal charges, sir?" one of them asked. The manacles were cold against Garak's wrists and he waited for the captain's answer. Until morning. He'd have no way to tell O'Brien that it hadn't worked.

"No," Sisko replied evenly, and Garak thought he detected a hint of sadness there. "Just hold him until morning."

9. Part Nine

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Nine****

Keiko kissed him on the cheek before returning with the yawning Molly to their quarters. Miles O'Brien remained, pacing the floor of the Infirmary with his crying child tucked in his arms. Doctor Girani had treated him, but wanted to keep him overnight. O'Brien volunteered to stay. He would have been up anyway, though he didn't tell Keiko that. She left with Molly and the nurse walked away. The light in the room was dimmed and Kirayoshi calmed down. He still wasn't asleep, but O'Brien was able to lay him down. He made a note to check on Garak once the baby was asleep. But Yoshi continued to squirm and coo, refusing to sleep.

It was the bustle that woke him, more than the hand on his arm. He opened his eyes. Yoshi was asleep, and Kira was standing in front of O'Brien. She was wearing her dress uniform. Behind her were nurses walking this way and that. They were in dress uniform, too. "Chief," Kira said, "you have to hurry. I'll stay here with Yoshi. Go home and change."

"What's going on?" O'Brien asked.

"Julian's leaving," she told him. "Soon." O'Brien, still groggy, stood up and gave her his seat. "Oh, you won't believe what happened," she added.

He felt his stomach drop. He was almost afraid to ask.

"What?"

"Garak was arrested last night," she said, as she patted Yoshi on the back. "He broke into Julian's quarters." She met O'Brien's eyes with hers. "He said he wanted to help him. But Captain Sisko stopped

him."

* * *

><p>Julian sat alone in his quarters. Jake was there, but he was in the other room. Julian was sitting on the couch with Chester--whom O'Brien had agreed could stay for awhile. The cat slept, but Julian didn't. He couldn't. He sat on the couch, clutching one of its pillows in his hand. He even visualized ripping it apart in frustration, but he didn't do it. He just sat, staring at the replicator on the wall simply because that was what was across from him. Jake was packing in the other room, and Julian still knew enough to know whose things were whose. Jake was packing Julian's things.<p>

The door chimed, though he didn't know it was the door. "Jay!" he called out, because that's as much of Jake's name as he could manage. Jake was already coming out of the room though. Julian watched him cross the room, but Jake never looked back at him. He only looked down.

The door opened and Captain Sisko was there. "Is he ready?" he said, but Julian didn't understand.

"He can't be ready," Jake said. He sounded sad. "He knows he's going away though. I can tell. He's not happy about it."

"I can't help it, Jake." Julian's father had had that tone of voice before. When Dad and Mom would argue, he'd sound like that. Usually it was because of Julian. Julian clinched the pillow in his other hand and was surprised when he felt the fabric rip. "I have orders. They'll take good care of him there. He'll be safe."

"Why can't he go home?" Jake asked. He hadn't even let the captain in the door. "He has a family. If it were me, I'd want you to send me back to Grandpa's." Julian put the pillow aside before he ripped it more. Jake sounded like his mother. She would stick up for him.

Captain Sisko sighed. "You're not in Starfleet, Jake. Can I please come in now?"

Jake moved aside so the captain could enter. He faced Bashir and Julian watched him talk. "Hello, Julian."

But Jake wasn't finished. "What if he resigned?"

The captain looked like he was getting angry, but he took a deep breath and spoke calmly. "It's not that simple," he said. "He didn't resign."

* * *

><p>Captain Sisko was still watching Bashir when he said that. His annoyance with Jake faded quickly when he realized that it was his own fault. Julian had wanted to resign. He talked him out of it, promising to help him. And what had he done? Nothing, though he had tried. Julian was worse off now, barely comprehending anything around him, certainly not speech. And now he couldn't even decide for himself what was to happen to him. He hadn't resigned and so the

choice wasn't his. "He didn't resign," he repeated. "I'm sorry," he said to Bashir. Julian just stared blankly back at him.<p>

Sisko took another deep breath. "Get his things, Jake. We have to go."

Jake glared at him once and Sisko tried to ignore it. Jake did what he was told and disappeared into the bedroom. He came back out with a bag over his shoulder. "Here," he said sharply, handing the bag to his father. He had a smaller bag with him, too. He knelt down near the coffee table and began gathering up Bashir's paper and pens. "You can take these with you," he said. He shot a look back up to Sisko. "He can take them, can't he?"

"Yes, Jake," Sisko replied, deciding it was just best to endure the attitude. "He can take whatever he wants." He almost thought perhaps Bashir had understood that last remark because he reached for the cat then. "Except for the cat." But Julian just patted it and rubbed its ears. Saying good-bye. He knew.

"He draws pictures," Jake told the captain.

"I know," Sisko said.

But Jake wasn't done. "And you'll have to draw pictures, too. It's the only way he can communicate. He can communicate, you know."

"Okay, Jake." Jake was just putting the last pen into the bag. He handed that bag to Julian and took his arm so that he'd stand up. "Ready?" Sisko asked.

Jake wasn't as angry when he spoke again. "Don't touch him to wake him up," he said. "He nearly snapped my wrist once."

"I'll try and remember."

Now Jake sighed. "I wanted to help him."

Sisko put his hand on his son's arm. He wanted to hug him, but thought that just might confuse Bashir. "You did, Jake."

Jake nodded and then turned back to Bashir. He took the doctor's hand so that he could shake it. "Good-bye," he said.

"Bye," Bashir whispered back. He did know.

Sisko waited until they were finished and then took Bashir's arm, turning him toward the door. The door opened in front of them, but Jake stopped them before they could leave. "I almost forgot Kukalaka!" he said. For a second, Sisko thought he was having problems understanding himself. But Jake ran back to the bedroom and came out with a stuffed bear. "He's had this whole life," he explained. "He should have it with him."

Bashir held out his hand for the bear and then tucked it gently into the bag that he carried. Then he stepped out the door. Sisko led him to the corridor that would take them to the runabout pad.

As he turned the corner, however, he was very surprised to see it

lined with people. There were Bajorans as well as Starfleet, all in dress uniform. He recognized some of them. Nurses, medtechs, and a few other doctors. But there were others as well, and Sisko knew he'd find the senior staff at the head of the line. They said nothing. They only stood in parade rest as he and Bashir passed. He practically had to pull Bashir along, as Julian was continually looking behind him, obviously quite interested in the spectacle.

Sisko was right. Kira and Dax and O'Brien were all near the runabout, standing next to Nog. Even Doctor Barton and Martok were there. They still said nothing. They didn't even seethe. Sisko passed them and then stopped just in the door.

There was a loud thump and he turned to see everyone coming to attention together. They saluted, and Sisko knew it was to Bashir and not himself. He hung back and gave Julian time to respond. Bashir was watching. He was aware of them, but Sisko didn't know if he knew what he was supposed to do. He watched Bashir look down the line of them, perhaps fifty people or more. Then he waved. He didn't salute. He just waved good-bye, like a child, and then stepped into the runabout.

Sisko went with him and let the door close. _Let them hate me,_ he thought. _They don't know any better._

It was a long trip, though not by the usual standards. Two days wasn't all that long. But it was when there was no one to talk to even when you weren't alone. Bashir sat in the Operations seat, though he never raised his hands off his lap. His bag of pens was beside him, but he didn't draw. He just stared, and it was unnerving. He was staring at Sisko. At first, he tried to ignore it. But six hours later, Bashir was still staring and the weight of it seemed to be boring a hole into his skull.

* * *

><p>Sisko checked the runabout's course and the proximity alarm and then turned to face the doctor. "What?" he finally said, knowing that Bashir wouldn't answer. Sisko stared back, and then he saw it. It wasn't a blank stare at all. There was something in Bashir's eyes that he hadn't ever seen directed at himself before. Distrust.<p>

"It's not what you think," Sisko tried explaining, hoping his voice and his gestures would carry some of the message through. "We're not going to the Institute. Not yet anyway. I'm not ready to give up on you."

Bashir didn't waver, and the distrust didn't go away. But he did speak, with some effort. "Tire," he said. "Sl--"

"You're tired?" Sisko asked, hoping he'd understood. Then he realized that Bashir probably couldn't find his way to the compartments in the back. He almost wished he'd brought Jake along. Jake had been with Bashir throughout his slide. He knew what Bashir could and couldn't understand, what he could do himself and what he needed help with. Sisko should have asked more questions when he had the chance.

Sisko led him to one of the back compartments where he'd put Bashir's

larger bag. Bashir seemed fine with that and turned his back on Sisko the moment he saw the bag. Sisko returned to the cockpit to check on the runabout. He boosted the power to sensors and hoped there was nothing in his way. The course he filed with the station and with Starfleet Command would take him along the periphery of the sector in the hopes of avoiding any Dominion or Cardassian vessels. Sisko had shorted that course just a bit though. He needed the time to make his detour. As it was, he'd shaved sixteen hours off the trip already, but he boosted speed now, bringing the runabout up to maximum warp. There was a greater risk going this way, but he'd already made up his mind. Besides Adigeon Prime lay along this course. The Institute would have to wait its turn.

* * *

><p>O'Brien pushed the cat off his lap and stood up. Yoshi was home again and doing well. He was playing with Molly. "Going somewhere?" Keiko asked. Her eyes told him that she was worried about him.<p>

"I just need to go for a walk," he told her as he headed for the door.

"I could go with you," she offered. "Jake could watch the kids."

He appreciated her offer and he wanted her close, but he had someone else to see. Garak was released just after the runabout left, but O'Brien had not tried to contact him yet. "I just need to be alone for a bit," he lied. He stepped out the door, and it began to close behind him.

"Say hello to Garak for me," Keiko called.

* * *

><p>Julian tossed and turned, but always returned to the same position, on his right side. In his mind he was swimming, fighting a current while the lightning flared around him. The river dried leaving him on a bleak shore. All around him he saw only white. Then it transformed, becoming shapes, dirty shapes marring the brightness. Buildings. Buildings he knew. And men. He was on his hands and knees, having come from the water that was no longer there. He tried to stand, but fell, his hands and feet slippery with mud. He rubbed his hands on his striped coat and walked unevenly toward the buildings.<p>

Lightning still fired around him, but when he looked he saw that it wasn't in the sky. It was draped in lines across the horizon, surrounding the buildings and himself. There was no way past it. He kept on toward the building. There was no lightning in the building. The building would be safe. The door stung his hand as he touched it. A small splinter of wood was lodged in his palm. He ignored it and threw open the door. The building was crowded with men all dressed in stripes like him. Some of them looked like Garak, with ridges around their eyes and on their necks. Some looked like elves, with pointed ears, but they were too tall.

One was a woman. She stood by the door. "Someone's coming," she said.

Bashir tried to ask her what she meant but he couldn't make the words

come out. He couldn't even think of the words. He only thought he should know what she said.

The door burst open and Bashir saw boots. Shiny black boots that showed him his own face. He looked up. Black uniforms with tubes of white liquid coming out of the chest and going into the necks of the wearers. There were two of them. They were horrid, with horns and ridges that weren't like Garak's. Bashir was afraid. They stepped aside and another man became visible. He wore black, too, but not like the horrid ones with the shiny boots. He had blond hair and he smiled.

His eyes were black to match his clothes, and he stepped forward toward Bashir. Bashir looked to the others for help. But they were gone now, and he was alone with the blond man. The man stepped closer, and Bashir tried to move away. But he couldn't move his legs. The man reached out his hand, his fingers spread. Bashir wanted to scream for help but he couldn't find his voice. He couldn't move at all. The hand reached toward him, toward his chest. But then it grabbed his arm.

He could move then and he took hold of the hand and pushed the man off his feet. He fell off his own feet and he felt dizzy. He closed his eyes and opened them. The building was gone, replaced by smooth walls. Sisko replaced the blond man, and he grimaced in pain. "You're hurting me," he said, but his voice was calm.

Bashir let go of his hand and Sisko rubbed it. They were both on the floor. Sisko sat up and rubbed his shoulder. Julian pushed away from him, running into the bed behind him. He was angry. Sisko had touched him while he was sleeping. He didn't like that. "D--" He struggled to find the word, but it wasn't there.

Sisko stood and offered a hand toward him, but Bashir pushed it away. "D--" he tried again. He stood on his own and sat back down on the bed. He tried the word again, but it wouldn't come.

"You were having a nightmare," Sisko said, his words all a jumble to Bashir.

Bashir didn't care what Sisko had said. He wanted to speak. He wanted to hear his own thoughts as more than mumbled syllables. He wanted to know where he was and why he wasn't in his quarters with Chester. But none of that would come out. So he picked up the pillow and threw it, wishing it were something heavier.

The pillow hit Sisko square in the nose. "I see your hand-eye coordination hasn't been affected," he said, though the humor was lost on Bashir who was just remembering that he had shoes. Sisko saw him looking at the foot of the bed and beat him to it. "I think I'll take these and just go back to the cockpit. I'm sorry I woke you. Jake warned me. I should've listened."

Now without his shoes or the pillow, Julian gave up and threw himself back down on the bed. He rolled over so his back was to Sisko. He heard a sound and when he looked again the room was empty. He closed his eyes. He didn't need a pillow.

In a few minutes, he was asleep again, floating down the river while the lightning flashed.

* * *

><p>Sisko rubbed his shoulder where it had come into contact with the wall. Bashir was fast. It must have been some nightmare. Jake hadn't told him about nightmares. But it made sense, Sisko supposed. Bashir had reacted badly because of his nightmare, lashing out at what he perceived as a threat within the dream. Sisko would let him sleep.<p>

The sensors showed nothing and Sisko leaned back in his chair, drumming his fingers against the console. It was still going to be a long trip. He could have used some company, but he'd already made that choice. _I'll have company on the return trip,_ he chided himself. _I'll have Julian to talk to._ He reminded the computer to wake him at 0600 or when a ship came into sensor range. Then he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

When he awoke again, it wasn't because of the computer or the sensors. Julian was staring at him. He had his pad of paper in his hands, and he looked as if he wanted to say something. "Computer," Sisko said, "what time is it?"

"It is 0555 hours," the computer droned. Bashir looked up as if trying to see who had spoken. He hardly seemed like the same man who had thrown him to the ground the night before.

"What is it, Julian?" Sisko asked, reaching tentatively for the pad. Bashir let him have it, and Sisko turned it over so he could see what Bashir had drawn. Sisko was surprised by his talent. The picture had an almost text-book quality, and it was immediately recognizable. Earth.

Bashir pointed to it and then pointed toward the forward viewscreen. Sisko forced the guilt he felt away. He was trying to help. This was better than going home. He shook his head. "No, Julian, we're not going to Earth."

Bashir snatched the paper away again and turned his chair toward the bow. He was angry. He was less able to hide such things now, Sisko realized. He had always been an emotional person, but he always managed to control his anger. And, considering he'd only thrown a pillow last night, Sisko assumed he could still control it. He looked down at Julian's feet. No shoes.

"They're over there," Sisko said, getting Bashir's attention. He pointed to the shoes, which were sitting on one of the other chairs. "They're yours," he added when Bashir didn't make any show of understanding. Bashir looked at the shoes and then back to Sisko. He didn't understand.

Sisko stood and picked up the shoes. He handed them to Julian and that seemed to finally make sense to him. He set his pad on the console and put the shoes on. Then he picked up the pad again and resumed staring at the forward viewscreen. _It's going to be a long trip,_ Sisko thought for the fifteenth time.

The rest of the day went by quietly. There was a slight scare when the long range sensors picked up a Jem'Hadar vessel. But it did not appear to have noticed them. The ship went on its way, and the

runabout went unharassed along its own course. Julian remained silent. He didn't draw and he didn't respond when Sisko asked if he was hungry. Sisko tried drawing a crude rendition of a plate of food, but Bashir wouldn't look at it. Sisko was starting to think that Bashir had gone catatonic. But he ate what was set before him, and Sisko realized he was just holding a grudge.

Sisko remembered once joking that he liked Bashir better quiet, but now he regretted those words. He'd give just about anything to have Bashir talk then so that he could explain to him why he wasn't taking him to Earth. Or so that Bashir and he could discuss that distance between them. Why the distrust? Didn't Bashir know him well enough after six years together to know that Sisko wouldn't intentionally harm him?

* * *

><p>Bashir stared at the main viewscreen watching the streaks of light fly by. It was a familiar sight, one that brought him pleasure. Captain Sisko was beside him at the helm and that was a memory too. He was trying to sleep while Sisko was speaking words he couldn't make out. He spoke himself, and remembered that what he said was funny. But the memory was a frightening one.<p>

He changed it, remembering other times. Jadzia Dax sitting where he was sitting now and Kira where Sisko was. He was standing between them, smiling at the streaks out the window. Kira and Dax were laughing. And that was the time he met Ekorla. He remembered her, too. He remembered the baby and Trevean. And he remembered putting Ekorla under the dirt and drawing letters on the ground. That was a sad memory.

He tried the runabout again and remembered Garak sitting in Sisko's seat beside him. They were anxious and scared, but also happy and relieved. A brilliant swirl of color blossomed before them and they went inside of it. Ribbons of light and sparkles rushed past them until the swirl appeared again and returned them to blackness and home. He saw himself returning to questioning faces and smiles.

He remembered his quarters and how he felt uneasy there seeing the new uniform in the closet. It was different, like the one Sisko was wearing now except a different color underneath. He remembered the uniform, his uniform, standing in the Infirmary, with people on beds smiling at him. He remembered so much, even if only in pictures. He remembered and it made him sad. He looked at his arms with the sleeves of the jacket he was wearing. It was not a uniform. There were no colored bands near his wrists. He looked at his shoes and at Sisko's, and they were not the same.

* * *

><p>It was the first time Bashir had moved in hours, and Sisko was puzzled by it. Bashir looked at each of his arms and then at Sisko's. He looked at his own feet and then Sisko's. The captain didn't know what to make of it, but since it did little good to discuss it, he tried putting it out of his mind. It wasn't hard. Another ship came into range. But, thankfully, it was Romulan. It was not a threat.<p>

To pass the time, he tried to come up with excuses he could give

Starfleet for disobeying orders. Of course, all of his excuses counted on Bashir being reenanced. Which was something he couldn't tell Starfleet command. Genetic enhancement was just as against the law now as it was when Bashir was a child. No, it would have to be a miraculous cure, a spontaneous thing brought on by some anomaly they'd run into which would also explain their tardiness. But it had to be convincing. Now he wished he'd brought Garak into his plan there in the corridor instead of having him put into custody. Garak was the best liar he knew. Except Bashir, though to be fair, Bashir hadn't so much lied as he had just neglected to admit the truth. It was a subtle difference, but it set him distinctly apart from Garak.

When Bashir fell asleep in the chair beside him, Sisko decided that the trip wasn't quite long enough. He still hadn't come up with a totally convincing lie, and they would reach the Adigeon system in just over seven hours. Sisko thought about waking Bashir and leading him to a bed in the back, but he decided against it, remembering the bruise on his shoulder. He yawned and set the computer to wake him as before. Then he followed Bashir's example, leaning back in his seat and closing his eyes.

* * *

><p>Where Julian's dream the night before had been bright with the white of snow, this time it was dark. It was night and the changeling was there. It snarled and spoke to him in mumbles. It dragged him from one place to another, from where Max was to the barracks that he shared with Tain and Martok, to the isolation cell and the darkness of the cellar. And then it left him alone. Darkness.<p>

In his dream, Julian stood and touched the walls, running his hands along the entire periphery of the room. But he felt nothing but cold cement and flat metal. There was nothing in the room except himself and the darkness.

He sat down in the center of it and waited. He waited for someone to come or for something to happen. Dreams were always changing and rarely stood still. But this one seemed to be locked in place. So he waited.

In time he could hear sounds. Skittering. No voices, no footsteps. The door to the cell never opened. But the skittering came anyway, closer and closer, from every side as if the walls had fallen away.

He turned his head this way and that trying to see the source of the sound. But there was only the blackness and the sound. Something brushed against his leg. It was furry, like Chester but not as soft. Another one brushed his other side. Another was behind him, and it stepped on his hand, leaving a small prick from its claw.

Julian jerked his hand up but the movement startled the things he still could not see. They pushed against him, growling and fighting with each other. Something sharp and painful bit into his arm. He stood up and tried to back away, but they were behind him and he fell, hitting his head against the wall. There was more pain then, as they bit his legs, his hands, his face. He screamed. But he did not wake up. He'd learned to sleep through such things. They tore at him, ripping the flesh from limbs. Their teeth penetrated his cheeks and

lips and even his eyes.

It wasn't until he stopped screaming that he awoke, gasping not for breath, but for light. But his eyes wouldn't work. Awake, he was allowed more than the dream, but the light was dimmed, the streaks of light on the viewscreen impossible to see. He turned his head and saw a form in black. There was only a little color to be seen on it, and he thought maybe it was Sisko. But it was blurred. He looked at himself, sitting in the chair, and saw the same blurs. He held up a hand in front of his face, but he couldn't make it clear. He couldn't even see his fingers.

* * *

><p>Sisko felt a hand on his arm, but resisted the call to wake up. The tentative voice with its half-formed word was more convincing. "Capt," it said.<p>

Sisko opened his eyes. Julian was still shaking his arm, still calling for him. "I'm up," Sisko told him.

At his voice, Julian jerked his hand away. He held it in front of his own face and shook his head. He touched one of his eyes, and Sisko understood. Bashir couldn't see, at least not very well. Bashir's hand shook. Either he was scared, or that was affected, too, by whatever had happened. Bashir dropped his hand and reached for the small bag that rested at his feet. It took him a few tries to actually touch it. But he managed and lifted it up. He opened it and found his paper. He flipped it open and pressed his hand against one of the drawings. He closed his eyes and dropped his head, letting the pad fall back into the bag. Even that had been taken from him.

Sisko wanted to say something, but he didn't know which words would help, especially since Bashir wouldn't understand them. The computer took away the opportunity though. The console lit up and Sisko checked the instruments. They were entering the Adigeon system.

10. Part Ten

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Ten****

There was some trepidation when the runabout docked. It was not often that a Starfleet vessel docked on Adigeon Prime. In fact, none ever had. The small M-class planet was a more recent affair, one that didn't really want to change that record. The colony was started by a geneticist less than a century before and had discouraged any diplomatic ties with the Federation since that time. In turn, the Federation discouraged knowledge of its existence. The colony had become a center for genetic research that exceeded the bounds of Federation medical ethics. Since the Eugenics Wars and the later

founding of the Federation, genetic engineering and DNA resequencing had been illegal within the Federation's jurisdiction, except in cases of severe birth defects. As much as the Federation tried to ignore the existence of Adigeon Prime, they still knew it was here. Most people wouldn't dream of coming. They'd been educated and socialized into an abhorrence and fear of the genetically engineered. But some, with fears for their children, or dreams too big, would come, hoping for a miracle or a child prodigy.

Julian's parents had been the former, Sisko knew, which made it only that much easier to accept the doctor. However, he knew that if it wasn't for the nearly five years he'd known Bashir before he found out, he wouldn't have cared to hear the reason for the enhancements. It was Julian that made the difference, and he brought a lot of questions with him. The old assumptions were not as valid as he once held them. Julian was no monster, and if he hadn't joined Starfleet illegally, he wouldn't even have been a doctor. Was it fair? Sisko could say no, but he couldn't find an assumption to take its place.

And Sisko's assumptions didn't change anything beyond his own opinion. So there was trepidation when he docked the runabout and a security escort when he disembarked with Bashir. Sisko surrendered his weapon to them, but not his determination. He demanded to be taken to Doctor Yvretin Mdiglas. It took over an hour to convince the security forces that he was not a threat. He explained that Bashir was a former patient of Mdiglas and that he needed the doctor's help again. Bashir's hand was placed on an instrument, which Sisko was told was used for identification purposes. The security guard nearest to Sisko nodded and ordered them to follow.

He held onto Bashir's arm and led him through the crowd who had gathered to watch. Bashir watched them back with wide eyes. Bewildered was the best word to describe him, and maybe afraid. Unable to see clearly or understand speech, Bashir had to be lost. His other hand clenched onto Sisko's arm. There was no doubt in Sisko's mind that there had been much less fanfare the first time he'd been brought here. Security pushed the crowd back so they could pass. They were led to a ground transport vehicle, and Sisko was glad, especially for Bashir's sake, to leave the crowd behind.

It was waiting for them again though at their destination, and Sisko assumed that Mdiglas had been notified. A bevy of white-coated doctors met them at the door to the facility. "I'm Yvretin Mdiglas." It was a stern man who had spoken, tall with angular features and orange-tinted skin. The others around him parted so that he could approach. But he didn't address himself to Sisko. He stood directly in front of Bashir. "Welcome, Julian Bashir."

Julian's hand on Sisko's arm relaxed when he heard the voice. Did he remember Mdiglas? He'd been only six years old. But a lot had happened the last time he was here, Sisko reasoned. There was perhaps much to remember, even for one so young. Finally, the doctor turned to Sisko. "I'm Captain Benjamin Sisko of Deep Space Nine."

"Sworn to uphold the laws of the Federation," Mdiglas added, with the slightest of smiles. "And yet you come here."

Sisko bit down his embarrassment and any sense of guilt he might have. No matter that he couldn't solve the entire problem genetic

enhancement entailed, he knew in his heart that Starfleet was wrong in this one case. "I need your help," he replied. "He needs your help."

"And is he a Starfleet Officer, as well?"

"A lieutenant," Sisko told them, allowing his pride to show. It was because of Mdiglas that Bashir had accomplished what he had. "My Chief Medical Officer until recently."

That raised an eyebrow. "And now?"

"And now," Sisko answered, "he needs your help again."

Mdiglas was apparently enjoying the game. He continued with questions, there in front of the door to the facility. "The Federation has given you permission to bring him here?"

So he would have to admit to acting illegally, unethically in bringing Bashir. Fine. As long as Starfleet didn't know about it. He doubted these people would turn him in. "No," he told Mdiglas. "I've acted on my own. The Federation was unable to find the cause of his present condition."

Then Mdiglas smiled, which was a decidedly odd thing, since he had no teeth. "Then I think it best we determine his present condition. Don't you agree?"

Sisko breathed a sigh of relief. There was a lot of distrust between these people and the Federation. But Mdiglas was willing to forego that. "I do."

Sisko didn't release Julian's arm, but a nurse came and took his other one, leading him into the facility. Once inside, the whole spectacle was over. It was business as usual. Sisko was made to wait in a comfortable waiting area, while Bashir was led away. The doctor looked over his shoulder fearfully, probably trying to see Sisko's familiar form. But in the sea of bodies around him, he couldn't make the captain out. He was still trying when Sisko lost sight of him.

* * *

><p>The voice was familiar, but that was all. The room was light, and that was all he could make out. There were other voices besides the familiar one, but that one spoke loudest. It sounded comforting, but Julian was not comforted. He was afraid. He didn't know where he was or what was to be done with him. Sisko had taken him away from Jake and Chester and Kira and now had left him alone with strangers. He only knew the one voice, but he didn't know why.<p>

People were touching him, and he was afraid that they would hurt him. His senses had betrayed him, leaving him with only phantoms to see and distortions to hear. He felt completely vulnerable and that brought memories. Memories were the one thing he could still see clearly. But the memories weren't pleasant. They were peopled by enemies, both human and Jem'Hadar. And he knew he couldn't fight either one. He was afraid and helpless, unable to see, unable to hear, and unable to understand. He sat still and did not resist when he was laid back or when things were attached to his head and body. He remained still and tried not to remember.

* * *

><p>Sisko found himself sitting for three hours. Everyone who passed stopped to do a double-take at the sight of a Starfleet captain in the waiting room. Sisko grew bored. After another hour, he remembered that he still had Julian's small bag. He wasn't sure why he had brought it. The pad and pens were useless to Julian now. But there was something else in the bag, and Sisko pulled it out now. It was a brown, stuffed teddy bear, scuffed and worn. One of its eyes was slightly askew, and it had obviously been patched and resewn many times. Sisko remembered what Jake had said. Julian had had the bear his whole life. He probably had carried it with him on his trip to this place nearly thirty years before. Sisko tried to imagine Bashir as a simple six-year-old, unable to comprehend his surroundings. It wasn't so hard, since he'd seen Bashir here only three hours before. The bear was probably a comfort for him, and Sisko regretted that the bear was out in the waiting room with him and not with Julian to comfort him now.<p>

He didn't expect the voice behind him. "Have you eaten, Captain?" Sisko turned to see Mdiglas standing over him. He put the bear back in the bag and stood.

"How is he?" he asked, ignoring the doctor's question.

"I asked you first," Mdiglas replied, his face written in perfect seriousness.

Sisko sighed. More distrust, more games. "No," he answered.

"Follow me," Mdiglas turned and walked with a quick pace out of the building. Sisko had to run to catch up.

"What about Bashir?" Sisko asked when he caught the tall doctor.

"Not here," Mdiglas replied, sounding a bit like Garak.

The crowds had dispersed but everyone within sight still ogled him and Sisko decided he'd have been better dressed out of uniform. But what was done was done. He just hoped it was worth the trip. Mdiglas led him to a small restaurant off the main square only a few blocks from the hospital facility. "Are you familiar with Adigeous food?" Mdiglas queried as they found a booth near the back and the waitress approached. Sisko shook his head, so Mdiglas ordered for both of them. The waitress left, and Mdiglas finally came down to business.

"Why did you bring him here?"

Sisko tried to keep his patience. He needed these people. They certainly didn't need him. "I told you. The Federation couldn't help him."

"Or wouldn't help him?" Mdiglas asked, scorn clearly echoed in his voice.

"Both," Sisko admitted. "They tried, but he's slipped back anyway." They both paused as the waitress returned with their food. Sisko eyed

it cautiously. It looked like standard fair, mostly vegetables, some sort of meat. He threw away his caution and took a bite of the small purple vegetables on the side of the plate. They was good, not wonderful, but good.

"But why did you bring him here," Mdiglas pressed. "Do you enjoy breaking your laws? Do you do it often?"

Sisko didn't like the implications. "No," he said flatly. "I do not. And if this had happened naturally, I might have had second thoughts about bringing him here. What was done was illegal, as you point out. Asking you to do it again is just as illegal, maybe more so. But it wasn't natural. It was deliberate."

"Do it again?" Mdiglas repeated, but he let that go and moved on to more pertinent issues. "Deliberate? Who did this to him? The Federation? Did they punish him once they found out?"

"No!" Sisko stated emphatically. "They let him stay on, keep his post. They wouldn't harm him in any case."

"Then who?" Mdiglas asked again. "Because he certainly has been harmed. If you'd waited another three days, he'd be dead."

"Dead?" That word caught at Sisko. It hadn't even crossed his mind that Bashir would die. "How? I assumed they reversed what you did, took him back."

"He had problems as a child, but he was never like this, I assure you," Mdiglas said. "Who did it?"

"The Dominion," Sisko answered. Adigeon may not be in the Federation, but they were still in the Alpha Quadrant. They had to know about the war. "He was a test. A new way to infiltrate our ranks. Bashir was a test of its effectiveness. They used a clone. He thinks he's succeeded. I want to prove him wrong."

"So you came here not to save your doctor," Mdiglas concluded, "but to save the Alpha Quadrant?"

"I hoped to do both," Sisko argued. "Did I do the right thing?"

Mdiglas smiled. "Yes."

Sisko felt a weight lift off his shoulders. The air rushed into his lungs happily as he took his next breath. "Then you can help him?"

"Yes," Mdiglas said again, "though we won't be re-enhancing him. That's not what he needs. It has nothing to do with his enhancements at all."

Sisko ate while Mdiglas rattled off an explanation. Bashir's chemistry had been subtly altered so that the synapses which carried impulses to and from the nervous system were unable to pass along the chemical charges. Sensory input was not delivered to the brain properly, nor could impulses be sent out. It was a gradual change, which explained Bashir's downhill slump and his partially-retained abilities. But the change showed no signs of letting up. In three

days, if left untreated, all the synapses would be, in effect, shut down. Sensory perceptions were a minor problem then. Involuntary muscles like the heart and the lungs would cease to function, waiting for directions from the brain.

"But why couldn't our doctors see it?" Sisko wondered out loud.

"They would have," Mdiglas assured him, "eventually. We're talking about subatomic particles and subtle changes. Right now, he's only sixteen percent off the norm. Two days from now, he'd be sixty. They'd see it then, but by then it would likely be too late. We're geneticists who go farther into the humanoid DNA than your Federation allows your doctors. We've got the equipment, the education, and the experience your doctors shy away from."

Sisko thought about that. The Federation feared genetic engineering, driving it underground. Starfleet doctors wouldn't be trained for it. "So what do we do?" Sisko asked, finishing the last of the cold, bitter liquid he'd been given to drink.

"_We_ change it back," Mdiglas answered, waving his hand for the waitress. He made no effort to pay for the meal when she arrived, and Sisko assumed it was his treat. He was prepared though. He'd packed enough latinum for the trip to make Quark drool. He hadn't been sure about the going rate for genetic resequencing. He paid the tab and the two men walked out. "But the question remains," Mdiglas continued, "as to what you will tell the Federation when you arrive at your real destination with a fully cognizant Doctor Julian Bashir."

"I've given it some thought," Sisko said. "It depends how long your treatment will take. I padded my flight schedule a bit."

"How long?"

"A day."

Mdiglas shook his head. "It will take longer than that. Three days, at the very least."

"Then I suppose I'll have to think of something else."

Mdiglas turned to him and smiled again. "We do more here than break Federation law," he said. He handed Sisko a card. They arrived back at the facility. Mdiglas didn't offer any other explanation about the card so Sisko didn't ask. It contained a name, Inheildi Treitsig, Private Insurer, and an address. "Come," Mdiglas said, "we'll keep him here at the hospital, but I'm sure you'll want to see him, give him the bear."

Sisko blushed a bit, but of course Mdiglas had seen the bear in the waiting room. "He's had it his whole life. Something familiar."

"I remember," Mdiglas told him. "His father tried to take it away so that we could perform the treatments unhindered. But the boy wouldn't have it. He was very sad when he came here."

"You have a good memory," Sisko commented as they stopped in front of a door.

"He would be hard to forget," Mdiglas admitted. "So many people bring their children here because they want them perfected. They're fine, normal children, but not good enough for the parents. I don't do this for them. I advise the parents against it, but, I admit, they pay the bills. I do it for the ones like the Bashirs. He had many problems, serious problems, that your Federation was remiss in not seeing. His father brought him here because he very much wanted to help his child. And the boy," he paused. "He wanted very much to please his father. Talk to him," Mdiglas advised. "He might recognize your voice. He'll certainly recognize the bear." He opened the door and allowed Sisko inside, though he didn't follow him into the room.

* * *

><p>Julian Bashir reclined on the bed too afraid to move. He couldn't see where he was but he knew he was alone now. Before there had been figures, big dark blobs that moved and made noises. They had touched him and put things on him that made other noises. They had covered his eyes and his ears. And then they all went away. One came back later and gave him some food. Then even that one went away and he was alone in the strange room that was not the station or home.<p>

Another sound. A blob approached from the far wall. "Julian," it said, and he knew the voice. Sisko had come back. He wanted to answer so that Sisko could find him but he didn't know how to make the word anymore. "Julian, they're going to help you." More noise from Sisko, but it sounded nice. "Do you remember this place?"

Julian said nothing but squinted hard trying to see Sisko. There was only the blob against the white of the wall. "Ho--ho-ome," Bashir pleaded, struggling with the word.

"I can't take you home, Julian," Sisko's voice said. "But I brought you something." He held out a smaller blob toward Julian.

Julian, not knowing what it was or what it's purpose was, made no move to take it. But Sisko handed it to him anyway, putting it down on Bashir's arm. It was fuzzy. He picked it up, and felt it, running his hands across its fuzzy middle up to its fuzzy top where hard little buttons made familiar eyes and a nose. "Kuk--" he said, and gave up trying to make the rest of it come out. He found the bear's arms and its legs. He filled in with his memory all that his eyes couldn't see, and Kukalaka was soft and clean and as new as Bashir's earliest recognition of it.

Sisko's blob stayed by the bed for a while longer, but he didn't say anything. Bashir didn't say anything either. He just held the bear and stared at it, seeing it with his mind's still unclouded eye. He felt better now.

11. Part Eleven & Epilogue

****Star Trek: Deep Space Nine****

****Pain of Memory****

By Gabrielle Lawson

with the generous help of Jo Burgess

****Part Eleven****

Sisko left the hospital and returned to the square. There was a shelter there where one could find public transportation. There was a transport waiting, so Sisko stepped in. "Anywhere in particular?" the driver asked. Sisko handed him the card that Mdiglas had given him. The driver nodded and gave Sisko a lopsided smile. "Understandable, considering the uniform."

Sisko let the comment go. He was starting to see that Treitsig's occupation had nothing to do with financing the treatments. He offered a different kind of insurance. Sisko remembered Richard Bashir telling him that they got falsified records for Julian's return to Earth. Treitsig might have been the very one to falsify them.

The driver actually drove him past the landing port where the runabout was docked. Or rather, where it was supposed to be docked. Sisko didn't see it. He leaned forward in his seat. "Stop here," he told the driver.

But the driver didn't obey, and the transport sped on. "Why? Is something wrong?"

"Yes," Sisko replied angrily, "my ship is gone."

The driver actually laughed. "That's why you have this, isn't it?" He was holding up the card.

Sisko leaned back again, not reassured but willing to wait this out. Mdiglas must have called ahead. He hoped Treitsig had something good in mind. The transport stopped in front of a rather plain office building. There was a door on the ground floor and a few windows but no other distinct architectural features. "Latinum?" the driver asked. "Comes out to two slips."

Sisko handed him the money and got out, but the door to the building opened before he could reach it. "Captain Benjamin Sisko of Deep Space Nine!" It was a woman, tall and of the same species as Mdiglas--which Sisko admitted he was unsure of.

"Inheildi Treitsig," Sisko offered in return, hoping he was right.

"At your service," she smiled and curtsied. "Please, walk with me."

They left the transport which sped off without them. Sisko noted they were walking in the direction of the port. "It's a beautiful day," Treitsig noted. "Unusual for this time of year."

"I'm not familiar with the climate," Sisko said, not caring for the small talk. "I assume Doctor Mdiglas told you I was coming."

"I believe you have a problem," she said, in return, neglecting to reply to Sisko's statement. "You can't tell your superiors where you are or how your doctor was cured of his ailments, am I right?"

Sisko nodded. "Doctor Mdiglas thought perhaps you might be of some help."

"It's what I do." She took his arm in hers as if they were two lovers out for a stroll. "See there," she said, pointing up to the sky. Sisko looked and he could just make out a pair of vessels. One was his runabout. The other was Adigeon, if one was to make an educated guess based on the majority of ships in the port. As he watched, the Adigeous ship fired on the runabout.

"What are they doing?" Sisko asked in alarm as another blast ripped into the runabout.

"Providing you with an alibi," Treitsig responded, hugging his arm. "You're at war, are you not?"

Sisko was speechless as he watched the runabout take another hit. It lost altitude; smoke was streaming from the stern. He nodded.

"We don't have the specs for Dominion weaponry, but Cardassian should do, I would think." Treitsig was all business now, and they stopped their stroll. "You were attacked by a lone Cardassian patrol. Your weapons system took a hit, and propulsion, too. You couldn't outrun the patrol, so you diverted your course to the Id'lasi Nebula, which I believe is only fifty thousand kilometers off your official course. The lassine gasses were enough to foil the Cardassian's sensors. You rigged a photon torpedo to fire manually only fifty meters from your port bow." As she spoke the Adigeous ship released a torpedo which exploded very close to the runabout's bow. "The Cardassians apparently fell for the ploy and assumed you were destroyed. But your ship was damaged."

Sisko watched as the Adigeous ship broke off its attack and took the damaged runabout in tow. "I assume the damage was minimal, since I had to fix it myself." The ship and the runabout sped out of sight.

"Not yourself," Treitsig corrected. "There was a slight hull breach. Emergency forcefields were active though, so little of the lassine actually penetrated the hull. But it did so in the aft compartment where Bashir was sleeping, causing an ionic discharge. He was unconscious when you found him, but when he awoke after nearly a day, he was miraculously recovered."

"That's good to hear," Sisko played along. He felt numb though. Seeing the ship torn apart like that wasn't easy. "It took us another two days to repair the ship's propulsion system."

"Well, if you'd had a decent spacedock and an engineering crew," Treitsig explained, "it would only have taken half a day, but you were short-handed and stranded in the nebula. Nevertheless, you were able to repair most of the damage and continued on course without further incident."

"One hopes," Sisko added. There was still another day's flight between the Id'lasi Nebula and the Institute, and Treitsig was right, there was a war on.

"Yes, considering you were unable to repair the damage to the

weapons."

Sisko turned her around and looked her directly in the eye. "We're at war. That Cardassian patrol might not be so fictional once I leave here. I need weapons. We'll be defenseless."

Treitsig shrugged. "Well you couldn't fix it from inside the ship."

"There's an EVA suit onboard," Sisko argued. "I went out."

"The lassine would eat right through it." She pulled away from Sisko's grasp and threw an unworried hand up. "I wouldn't worry. You fired the torpedo, didn't you?"

Sisko was impressed with the way she never spoke in what-if's. To her, it happened. "Manually," he admitted, deciding she had the right attitude. He couldn't doubt the story if he didn't want Starfleet to doubt it. "It would be hard to hit a moving target."

"But not impossible," she reminded him. "And you do have a genetically enhanced doctor aboard."

"If all goes as well," Sisko agreed. It was a good story, especially since the ship would corroborate the lie. "Where did they take it?" he asked, pointing to where the runabout had been.

"Id'Lasi," Treitsig answered, turning back to Sisko. "Lassine gas. Ionic discharge, remember?" She waited for his nod. "Good, let's go back to my office. You have some logs to record."

* * *

><p>For Sisko the days passed quickly. He had to record log entries to Inheildi Treitsig's demanding satisfaction. He had to sound tired and frustrated and triumphant at different times. He had to convince her in order to hopefully convince his superiors. And he had to memorize every detail of the repair work he had done to get the runabout moving again. Of course, six engineers had actually been at work on the vessel, but he had to memorize two thirds of everything they did. The other third was for Bashir, since he would help repair the ship after the ionic discharge cured him. It was a lot of work and it felt, Sisko thought, like being back at the Academy, cramming for an exam. Luckily, the exam wasn't for several more days.

Treitsig made sure it was a hands-on cramming session, with schematics and holograms and field trips to the damaged runabout, which had been docked again after its run-in with the nebula. Despite her perfectionism, or maybe because of it, Sisko was beginning to like her. She had a love of detail that conveyed sincerity. She seemed truly to want to help her customers and keep them from harm. She could be dangerous, in other lines of work.

Sisko also made time each day to visit Bashir, and it was harder than all the studying. The treatments Bashir was given were painful. Not horrific, Mdiglas had assured him, but even low levels of pain for a long duration could become unendurable. The day before, when Sisko had come, Bashir was staring at the ceiling, clutching the bear to him. His fingers were white with the effort. He was motionless, but

his face was pale and his knuckles were white from the grip he held on the stuffed animal. But tonight was different, and it filled Sisko with hope and anguish at the same time.

Bashir was watching him. "P--please," he said. It was slow and halting, but it was a whole word. And then there were more. "Make it stop."

Sisko didn't know how to answer him. He looked to Mdiglas, who was standing off to one side. Mdiglas was silent, so Sisko turned back to Bashir. "Julian, do you understand me?" He spoke slowly, not wanting to bombard Bashir with too much at once. Bashir nodded and then closed his eyes. Sisko knew he was still listening though. "We can't stop yet, Julian. Do you remember being sick?"

"Not sick," Bashir replied, opening his eyes again and meeting Sisko's gaze. The words were still a struggle for him, but he was expressing whole ideas. "I don't know what, but not sick."

Sisko smiled. Bashir understood more than the words. He understood their meanings. "Alright," Sisko agreed, "not sick. But you weren't well. Do you know where you are?"

"Hospital." He looked around and spotted Mdiglas. "I remember you."

Mdiglas smiled. "I helped you when you were a child. I'm helping you again."

"It hurts," Bashir told him.

"I know," Mdiglas replied. "But it is necessary."

"You're getting better, Julian," Sisko said. He touched Bashir's arm, but jerked his hand back quickly. He'd felt a shock. He ignored it for Bashir's sake. "You can last one more day."

"Then home?" Bashir asked. "To DS Nine?"

"Soon." Sisko didn't want to worry him about the Institute just yet. Mdiglas motioned for him to come out in the hall, so Sisko bade Bashir goodnight and followed the doctor out. "How is he?"

"You can see for yourself the improvement," Mdiglas replied, though it wasn't really an answer. Sisko pressed him for more. "Four percent off the norm. He's regained his sense of sight and hearing, and his ability to speak."

"More than that," Sisko interrupted. "He understood."

"On a simple level, yes," Mdiglas agreed. "But he's not normal, remember, he's genetically enhanced and he must be returned to that level. Another day. You'll have at least one more day's journey once you're on your way. He'll continue to improve after we've stopped the treatments. You'll see it."

Sisko glanced back through the window to Julian's room. "I can already see it," he said quietly. "I just wish it was easier on him."

"From the looks of things, it wasn't easy when it happened in the first place," Mdiglas held. "We're not intentionally hurting him."

Sisko sighed. "I know. I'd better get back to Inheildi's. She's not satisfied with my Bashir-recovery log. I think I can be more convincing tonight."

"Think of the improvement," Mdiglas suggested, "not the pain. He didn't feel the discharge and he was unconscious afterward. No pain. Just improvement."

Mdiglas knew the story, too. "Right," Sisko agreed. "Thank you, Doctor. I'll be by to see him tomorrow." Mdiglas nodded and bowed slightly, and Sisko took his leave.

Sisko was there the next evening when the treatments were stopped. Bashir sagged against the bed. His eyes closed and his fingers released their vice-like grip on the teddy bear. But he didn't fall asleep. His eyes opened again and found Mdiglas to his left. "Thank you," he breathed.

"How do you feel, Julian?" Sisko asked.

"It stopped," Bashir said, turning his head to find the captain. "I feel great. Will you tell me now what's going on?" His speech was almost normal now, with barely a lag.

Sisko wasn't sure if he should answer. So he asked another question. "What do you remember?"

* * *

><p>"I'll take that as a 'no,'" Bashir sighed. "I remember being here, a long time ago, when I was little. But you probably mean more recently."<p>

Sisko couldn't help but smile. "Yes, more recently."

"I remember waking up one morning and not being able to read," he answered. "And I remember Jake and Chester moving in with me. We couldn't find anything wrong. You wouldn't take me home to Earth."

"I brought you here," Sisko told him. He sounded normal, but there was no way to tell how intelligent he was from just the short conversation. Sisko looked to the doctor for a more objective opinion. "How is he, Doctor Mdiglas?"

"Less than one percent off the norm," Mdiglas reported. "But he still has a way to go."

"Norm for what?" Bashir asked, looking back at Mdiglas.

Mdiglas explained, "For a human. A normal human. Which explains why you still need improvement."

Bashir's forehead creased. "More of what you were doing to me?"

"No," Mdiglas assured him. "That's finished. You'll continue to recover on your own."

"I want to read," Bashir said. He turned to Sisko. "I want to know that I can read."

Sisko looked to Mdiglas, but the doctor shook his head. Sisko didn't have anything on him, but he did have the bag that Jake had packed. He rummaged through it. The pad of paper was there, and Sisko thought he could write something out with one of the pens. But then his hand hit something else, something hard. He lifted it out and found that it was a book. "I wonder why he packed this," Sisko mumbled.

Bashir was smiling when he looked up again. "It's my favorite. _A Tale of Two Cities._"

"You read that off the cover?" Sisko turned the book so that the cover wasn't showing.

"Yes," Bashir said, still smiling. "I remember how it goes. 'It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.'" Sisko handed him the book, but to his surprise Bashir flipped it open from the back. "Have you read this, Captain?" he asked.

Sisko shook his head. It was a classic, of course, but there were a lot of classics. He'd had to read many of them in school, but teachers couldn't assign all of them. "Is it any good?"

"Here at the end," Bashir told him, "it's the most beautiful thing I've ever read."

"Maybe you can read it to me," Sisko suggested, "for the rest of the trip." Then he remembered that Bashir would have something else to read on the trip. Something he'd have to memorize.

* * *

><p>"Rest?" Bashir closed the book. "We're not going back?"<p>

"Not yet." But Sisko still didn't think it was the right time to tell him about the Institute. He wanted to wait until Bashir was recovered enough to understand Inheildi's story and the reason for the lie. There was a lot at stake.

Bashir saved him the dilemma though. He yawned. The treatments had kept him awake. He was tired. Mdiglas ordered him to rest, and Sisko had to leave.

* * *

><p>It took Bashir awhile to fall asleep, so he opened the book again and began to read. It was easy now to put the letters together, though Dickens's antiquated dialect was harder to decipher. But for now, he was satisfied to read the words. The ideas would come later. He could feel it. The day before he had heard his own thoughts, voices in his dreams. He was so elated that no nightmare could remain in his head. He'd dream someone else speaking to him and the nightmare would fade. When he could understand Sisko when he was awake, it was a revelation to him. He was getting better. He felt a lot like he had after his first time in this hospital. His mind was

opening up, growing. Only this time he didn't have to be afraid of what was happening. He'd been through it before, experienced the results. He was not gaining something new, but regaining what was lost.<p>

But it nagged at him that he still didn't know why he'd lost it. He decided to ask Sisko again when he returned. And this time, he'd demand a straight answer.

* * *

><p>By the time he saw Captain Sisko again, however, Julian Bashir was being released from the hospital. Doctor Mdiglas walked him to the door where Sisko was waiting with a transport vehicle. But Bashir stopped in the doorway. "I want to thank you," he told Mdiglas. "Not just for this time."<p>

Mdiglas held out a hand. Julian took it and the two men shook. "You're welcome, Doctor Julian Bashir. I'm proud to see you have put my efforts to good use."

"I try," Bashir replied, smiling. "Thank you."

"You already said that," Mdiglas teased. "Good luck at the Institute."

Bashir's smile fell flat. "The Institute?" That was where Jack and the others were, locked up, stored away.

Sisko stepped forward and touched Julian's arm. "We really have to be going now, Julian."

Bashir didn't even look at him. "Don't patronize me." Still he turned and followed Sisko to the transport. He had questions and Sisko was the one who had the answers. He waited until the transport's door was shut and the driver was given his directions. Then he reached over and activated a panel by the door. A transparent wall went up between he and Sisko and the driver. "Why were you taking me to the Institute?" he demanded.

"Privacy shield?" Sisko asked, in turn, pointing to the panel. "How did you know?"

"I've been here before," Bashir reminded him. "I remembered. Answer the question."

Sisko leaned back in his chair and put on his stern face. It was a familiar one to Bashir, one he used when he had bad news or unpleasant orders to give. "Starfleet ordered it."

"Because of my. . . ." Bashir realized he still didn't know what had happened to him, so he didn't know what to call it.

"Yes," Sisko acknowledged, apparently understanding anyway. "When we couldn't find any way to help you, they ordered you to the Institute."

Bashir could understand it, partly. But he'd expressed his own wishes to O'Brien in case he became incompetent to speak for himself "Why wouldn't they let me go home? Didn't the Chief tell you?"

"He did, and I tried." Sisko steepled his fingers and Bashir knew the news was going to get worse. "Starfleet Command and Starfleet Medical were adamant that you be taken to the Institute."

Bashir tried but he still didn't understand. It was like Sisko was not telling him something. But at the moment, he had other questions. "What happened to me? The truth."

"I can't explain it like Doctor Mdiglas, but your chemistry was changed. You couldn't process thoughts or sensory input."

"How did it change? Was there something wrong with the enhancements?"

"No." Sisko seemed more relaxed now, as if he didn't mind talking about what happened. Only Starfleet's reaction to it seemed to bother him. "It was deliberate."

"On purpose?" Bashir tried to grasp that. Someone had changed him on purpose.

"The Dominion," Sisko supplied even before Bashir could ask who had done it. "You were a test."

"A test?" Bashir realized he was just repeating Sisko but it was a lot to take in. The Dominion attacked him personally but only as a test. "A test for what? How? When did they do it?"

The transport began to slow as they neared the docking port, but Bashir wasn't ready yet. "They captured and cloned Lieutenant Jordan," Sisko explained. The transport had stopped and Bashir could see that Sisko was in a hurry. "You were a test to prove the effectiveness of his infiltration into the crew. We have to go, Julian. Starfleet doesn't know I've taken this little side trip. And they can't know. I'll explain it all in the runabout, I promise."

Bashir deactivated the privacy shield and Sisko paid the driver. They got out together and walked toward the runabout. Bashir could see scorch marks and ragged metal. "Were we attacked?" he asked. "I don't remember being attacked."

"You will," Sisko said, smiling.

* * *

><p>Bashir spent three hours going over the papers Sisko gave him. He read them and reread them and Sisko guessed he was trying to memorize them. He still wasn't fully recovered, Sisko realized. He had too many questions still. Fully recovered, Bashir would probably have put most of the pieces back together himself. Sisko only hoped he was able to convince Starfleet of his recovery. If he wasn't "himself" again by the time they arrived, there wouldn't be any chance of getting him out of the Institute once he was in.<p>

"This is how my parents did it," Bashir finally said. "Not this." He indicated the paper. "Not exactly, but something like this."

"I would imagine," Sisko replied. "Your father said he got false

records for you."

"Did you make all this up?" Bashir was looking over his notes again. "It's complicated."

Sisko smiled. "No, I had help. Inheildi Treitsig, Private Insurer. She was expensive, but she does good work."

"I can't understand some of this technical stuff," Bashir admitted nervously.

"You will understand it," Sisko assured him. "Give it time. But memorize it anyway. You have to believe that this is what happened. Just as it's written there. The computer and the logs will all back it up. Don't worry."

Bashir still looked worried, and Sisko decided he needed a break, so he changed the subject. "Do you remember dreaming about lightning?"

Bashir looked up from the papers. He stared at Sisko for a moment, his face a blank. And then he remembered. Sisko could see it in his face. "No," he said, and now Sisko was confused. "I remember dreaming about being electrocuted."

"You were," Sisko admitted. "Not electrocuted, really, because you're still alive, but shocked anyway. Jordan sabotaged your quarters on the Defiant. You dreamt it because it was really happening."

"That's how they changed me?"

Sisko nodded. "We wouldn't have known except that Hensing got shocked, too, when he slept in your quarters."

Bashir was quick with his next question. "Did he change?"

Concern for others. Very doctorly, Sisko thought. "Not that I'm aware of. But it only happened to him once."

"And he wasn't genetically enhanced," Bashir deduced. "It might not have affected him in the same way. You said I was the test. Me, specifically."

Sisko nodded. "They see you as a threat."

Bashir looked away, toward the front viewscreen, and he looked very much like he had only three days before when he'd been so different. "Does Starfleet see me as a threat?"

Sisko didn't want to tell him the truth. But he also didn't want to lie, not for Starfleet, not on this. "Maybe," he compromised. "But they won't do anything, not if you're recovered. Your record is too good. You have too many friends. They wouldn't risk it."

Bashir turned and met his gaze. He was recovering every minute, Sisko realized. "That doesn't sound like 'maybe.'" Nuances. He was sharp.

"There are some who apparently don't agree with you remaining in

Starfleet," Sisko admitted. "But there are those of us who do. And as long as you're--"

"Not stupid," Julian interjected. "As long as I'm brilliant, they can't do anything without causing too much negative attention. They've lost their excuse."

Sisko smiled, not at what he was saying, but because he was saying it. "You should read those notes again, Julian. I think you understand more than you think you do."

* * *

><p>Bashir woke up the next morning and looked at Kukalaka, who had taken up a place on the floor since there was a lack of furniture in the compartment. He smiled, leaving his dreams behind. "You're not Chester," he told the bear, "but you'll do." He picked the bear up and looked for the bag so he could pack it away. But the bag wasn't there. It was in the cockpit. He'd have to carry it out. That gave him a moment's pause. But only a moment. It wasn't like Sisko hadn't seen the bear already. So he changed into the new uniform Sisko had laid out for him and joined Sisko in the cockpit.<p>

"Good morning," the captain called, stretching his arms.

'Morning," Bashir returned.

"No problems so far," Sisko reported. "It's been a smooth trip. We should reach the Institute shortly."

And then we lie to Starfleet, Bashir thought. "I can hardly wait," he said.

Sisko smiled at that. "So what's the story with the bear?"

Bashir gave him a half-smile and found himself embarrassed. "We've been through a lot together, Kukalaka and I," he said, trying to sound nonchalant about it. "Things change, people change, the whole universe changes. But Kukalaka doesn't. I can't remember when I got him, I was so young. But I've kept him all these years, patching and stuffing him when he needed it." His smile faded. "I changed. Kukalaka was there before, and he was there after. He's a constant."

Sisko wasn't smiling anymore either. Perhaps he understood. "You don't sound happy about being enhanced."

Bashir thought for a long moment. "When I was fifteen-years-old, I was . . . I don't know . . . normal, in some respects, I guess. Fifteen isn't easy, you know. Except I was smarter than everyone else. And I was probably too cocky about it." He realized he was babbling a bit, but it wasn't something he talked about a lot. He'd spent most of his life not talking about it. But now things were different, and it was Sisko who had helped him. "I remembered what it was like--what I was like--before the enhancements. I remembered being . . . stupid. Then all of a sudden I wasn't, and I was getting the highest marks in class. I loved it. The other students made fun of me, called me names. You know how kids can be. And when I was fifteen, that's when I found out. I had learned, like everyone else, that genetically enhanced people were dangerous. They were freaks,

monsters like Khan. And all of a sudden I was one of them. And all I'd ever done, all I'd thought I had accomplished, it wasn't me. It was the enhancements and I was a freak because of them."

He wasn't looking at Sisko, but he could tell the captain was watching him. He was listening. Bashir continued. "I resented it, and I resented my parents for having it done. I felt guilty. I had cheated. I was unfair. I had taken over this body from that trusting little boy who didn't understand anything. And I had thrown him away. I had usurped his life, replaced him. I didn't understand it then, but my parents meant this as a gift. But to me, it was a burden, a curse and no matter what I did, no matter how good a doctor I was or how many lives I saved, I'd still be a monster inside. There were days, I wished it had never been done.

"These last weeks, when it was all slipping away--or at least I thought it was--I felt I deserved it as punishment for what I was. I thought I could be glad. I was becoming Who I was born to be, who I was meant to be. The curse would be gone, the burden gone, the responsibility gone. But I wasn't glad. When I felt my mind slipping away, I wanted to keep it. I tried so hard to hold on. I didn't want to be that little boy again. I wanted to be me. Julian Bashir, the doctor."

He was quiet again for a long time, waiting to see if Sisko would say anything or just waiting. "I'm really quite fond of my mind," he said finally, looking over at Sisko. "Maybe it's not fair what my parents did. Maybe it's not right for me to appreciate it, but I do. I'm glad I'm not that little boy. I want this mind. Maybe I don't deserve to have it, but I've tried to do good with it. And I'm glad to have it back."

"I'm glad, too," Sisko told him. "And I can't think of anyone who deserves it more."

The computer made some noise, and Sisko looked at the console. Bashir looked out the viewscreen. They were entering a star system. They were there.

* * *

><p>Sisko straightened his jacket and looked Bashir over. His uniform was perfect. "You ready?"<p>

"You've got an easier task, you know," Bashir replied. "You'll only be tested on the trip. I'll probably have to take my med school finals over again."

Sisko smiled, and clapped him on the shoulder. "Well, remember the difference between the postganglionic nerve and the preganglionic fiber this time."

Bashir nodded. "Right. Shall we?"

Sisko opened the door and they stepped out. Like at Adigeon, there was a crowd waiting. Doctor Loews was among them. She didn't look happy. At least Bashir had an ally. Ross was there, too, and he didn't look any happier. He stepped forward. He eyed Bashir, his brow furrowed in confusion. There was another admiral behind him, but this one wore blue. Starfleet Medical, Sisko guessed, probably one who

wanted to get rid of Bashir. She'd be surprised. Ross leaned forward and spoke quietly. "You're late. We've had ships out looking for you."

"We were attacked," Sisko whispered back.

"It's quite easily explained, Admiral," Bashir interjected. He was still facing front. But he'd obviously heard. "We are at war after all, sir. One runabout traveling this whole distance. The chances of our not running into an enemy vessel were two hundred and sixteen to one."

Sisko tried not to smile. This could almost be fun. Almost. Even Ross had a glimmer in his eye. "Cardassians hit us hard, Admiral" Sisko explained to Ross, speaking loud enough that the others might hear. "We took shelter in the Id'lasi Nebula. It took us awhile to repair the runabout. We couldn't risk a transmission giving our location away. We proceeded as quickly as we could. Doctor Bashir needs medical attention."

"I feel fine, sir," Bashir protested.

"No argument, Doctor," Sisko held firm.

The other admiral moved forward now. "I assure you, Captain, he will receive a thorough examination."

"Good to see you again," Bashir said, gazing at her uniform, "Admiral Fayla. Congratulations on your promotion."

She glowered. "Thank you, Lieutenant."

Bashir held a hand up. "It's Doctor," he corrected, though he didn't sound as confident now.

Fayla seethed, taking in a deep breath and then turning sharply away. "Follow me," she ordered.

Ross looked back at her and then at Sisko. His expression wasn't encouraging. He turned to Bashir. "Good luck," he whispered, "Doctor."

Bashir nodded, took a deep breath of his own, and followed Admiral Fayla into the facility.

Ross watched Bashir go and then turned to Sisko. "Cardassians?"

Sisko nodded. "Perhaps we should discuss it inside," he suggested.

Ross was still whispering when they went in. "I don't know what you did," he said. "But your story had better hold water."

"What story?" Sisko held. "All I have is the truth."

"They'll check the runabout," Ross warned.

"Good," Sisko replied, still calm. "There's only so much the two of us could do from inside."

Ross stopped and gave him a look that said he wasn't buying it. But Sisko knew he could keep it up. It was the truth. Inheildi had taught him that. "In here," Ross said, tilting his head to indicate the administrator's office. He waited for the door to close. "You wouldn't be a clone, would you?" Sisko regarded him closely. Ross was all seriousness now. "Bashir's miraculous recovery would make for a convenient cover for our clone."

"If so," Sisko reasoned, "then we might be expected to drop our defenses in regards to clones infiltrating our ranks." It made sense. It also made an easy out for Starfleet in regards to Bashir.

Ross nodded. "You won't mind then, if we have you tested?"

"Absolutely not." Sisko stood up and walked to the door. There was a security officer just outside. Sisko turned back to Ross. "You'll want to test Bashir as well."

"Of course."

****Epilogue****

It took Starfleet Medical three more days before they released Bashir. Sisko had taken the time to visit his father in New Orleans. But now, the runabout was docked on the USS Misashi undergoing repairs, and Sisko was on his way home. "How did you do?" Sisko asked Bashir, trying to sound casual. They were seated at a table in the Misashi's Officer's Lounge.

"I think they tested every inch of me," Bashir complained. "I don't want to be touched again for at least a year." He joked, but he played the part well, looking quite glum about it.

"And the medical exams?"

"Just like I'd imagined," he answered. "Finals again."

Sisko couldn't help but tease. "And the preganglionic--"

Bashir cut him off with a hand. "Oh I've got visions of preganglionic fibers running around in my head. I dreamed about them."

Sisko smiled. "So how'd you do?"

Bashir took a sip of his tea. "Confused them. It seems my IQ is a few points higher than before."

Sisko laughed at that. "Those pesky ionic discharges. Gotta watch out for those."

Bashir set down his mug. "Well, I should think that was your fault. I was rather incoherent at the time. You flew us into the nebula."

"It was either that or be shot down by the Cardassians," Sisko argued in his defense. "I have something for you." Bashir didn't say anything, so Sisko handed him the PADD he'd been carrying. "Your transfer papers."

A look of panic passed Bashir's face and he grabbed the PADD. Then he smiled. "They're all going to be surprised to see you," Sisko told him. "I think they're getting used to Doctor Barton."

The End

End
file.